This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

THE FLOWING ROAD

BY CASPAR WHITNEY

Digitized by Google

Case *Shelf*

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

LIBRARY

OF THE

PEABODY MUSEUM OF AMERICAN ARCHÆOLOGY AND ETHNOLOGY

GIFT OF

LOMBARD C. JONES

(A.B. 1887, M.D. 1890)

FALMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS

Received December 7, 1919

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE FLOWING ROAD

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

THE CARGO-BOAT OF THE RIO NEGRO

IN THE LARGER BATELAOS THE CREW WORK THEIR OARS FROM ON TOP THE TOLDO

Digitized by Google

THE FLOWING ROAD

ADVENTURING ON THE GREAT RIVERS OF SOUTH AMERICA

BY

CASPAR WHITNEY

AUTHOR OF

"A SPORTING PILGRIMAGE," "ON SNOWSHOES TO THE BARREN GROUNDS," "HAWAIIAN AMERICA," "JUNGLE TRAILS AND JUNGLE PEOPLE," ETC.

WITH MAPS AND PHOTOGRAPHS
BY THE AUTHOR

PHILADELPHIA & LONDON

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

1912

17652

Digitized by Google

S.A. W61
g. of Woodward C. Mines
Pac. Dec 7, 1919.

COPYRIGHT, 1912, BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER, 1912

PRINTED BY J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY
AT THE WASHINGTON SQUARE PRESS
PHILADELPHIA, U. S. A.

Digitized by Google

To

MY WIFE

But for Whose Inspiring Example this Delayed
Record of the Call of the Red Gods
Would Never Have Been
Submitted.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

FOREWORD.

The chapters in this volume are from the experience of five separate overland and river expeditions into South America, beginning in 1902. Largely these were by canoe, and chiefly on streams more or less connecting—hence the significance of the title—Flowing Road.

They embraced a continuous journey from Santa Isabel, on the Rio Negro, in Brazil, to Ciudad Bolívar, on the Orinoco, in Venezuela; from San Fernando, on the Apure, to the head waters and return, of the Orinoco, *via* the Atabapo and the Casiquiare; down the Portuguesa, in Venezuela, the Apure and the Orinoco to its mouth; and on the Parana, the Salado and Feliciano rivers in Argentine. The saddle trips included crossing the llanos, which stretch between the Venezuelan north coast mountain range and the Orinoco on the south, and the llanos and the forest to the east of Lake Maracaibo; skirting the Cordilleras at the east of Colombia; across the Andes into Chile; and some penetration of the pampas of Argentine and the forests of Brazil. Incidental to getting to and from the frontier I sojourned for brief periods at a majority of the leading cities on the continent.

In the far southeastern corner of Venezuela roam a native people whom common report of the country declares to be savage and unknown. To have a look at these was the object of two of my most prolonged journeys,—approaching on one occasion by way of

Digitized by Google

the Amazon, Rio Negro, Atabapo and Orinoco, and on another ascending the Orinoco and the Casiquiare. For the rest, I will admit frankly to have been impelled neither by a wish to hunt the beasts of the jungle (although such always served as my excuse for escaping the bounds of civilization), nor to report upon the economic, social or industrial conditions of the land, nor even to add to the sum of knowledge of the scientific world;—but solely to satisfy the horizon hunger which incites me every now and again to go and "see things,"—that curiosity which Professor Shaler has called the "primal instinct."

And I must say also with equal frankness that no country I have travelled is, as a whole, so frequently or so persistently misrepresented in print as this same potential South America.

Much of this is due to newspaper dispatches inspired by self interest (like unto those coming so often out of Cuba), and to magazine articles revealing a prejudice born of ignorance; some of it to the surface observations of casual tourists; and some of it to the travellers who seek to impress their valour upon home friends by colouring letters and tales fantastically with fever, robbers and reptiles. The three favourite themes of these vaunting rather than evilly disposed raconteurs are,—the audacious multitude of snakes; the malignant prevalence of fever; and the beauty universal of the "dark-eyed senoritas."

But this is not to infer that all travel in South America is luxurious or even agreeable. It depends on where you journey. To all the important centres you may go comfortably. You can ascend the Ama-

Digitized by Google

zon, the Parana, the Magdalena, and the Lower Orinoco, to San Fernando on the Apure, by excellent steamers. In a sleeper from Buenos Aires on the Atlantic side you can cross the Andes through a tunnel to Valparaiso, on the Pacific. In comfortable railway coaches you can travel far in Argentine, see something of Venezuela, Chile and Brazil, and in Peru and Ecuador enjoy two train trips reckoned among the famous of the world. Through all the sparsely settled interior you may go laboriously yet safely, so far as molestation by natives is concerned. But the great middle land is *terra incognita.*

There are sections of the wilderness where you should not venture, unless adequately supported; and in all wilderness South America the going is arduous in the extreme, frequently dangerous, and work only for the hardy and the experienced traveller.

It is an oft-heard colloquism that South America is "not on our map"; and the gibe is no mere jest, as you can determine by turning to the "Atlas of the World," issue of 1907, where, on page 67, you'll find stated that the "Orinoco and its tributaries are navigable for 4,300 miles"! By the light of its geographical propinquity and its mighty trade promise, how strange appears our unacquaintance with this great continent!

This volume, as I say, is no trade report, but I cannot refrain from asking contemplation of the fact that despite bad packing (a common failing of American shippers), and unintelligent selling effort on the part of our merchants, Brazil bought, in round numbers, about one million more dollars' worth from us than Japan during the same period, according to the

Digitized by Google

last obtainable annual figures; while Argentine purchases exceeded those of China by eighteen millions. In a word, we sold seventy-four millions to South America, while we were selling thirty millions to China and Japan,—where exporters maintain ever an alert and discerning trade eye. We are forever shouting about an open door in the Far East,—yet here at hand is one wide open which either we ignore or enter irresolutely—and blunder.

Nor can I forego this opportunity to beg of my compatriots a more open mind when they visit our neighbours. We are prone to look South Americans over from our viewpoint only; to judge them by our standards of work and play; our business methods, our accomplishments. The attitude is both unintelligent and unfair, failing as it does to take into account their antecedents, their temperament, their handicaps of race and government, and the comparatively undeveloped condition of their great hinterland. They lack our kind of progressive spirit, it is true, but they are advancing and they are hospitable, kindly, polite; while those who have had business relations with them tell me they are desirable customers.

On the other hand, it is very nearly as unfair to exalt them unduly, as a recent author has done in declaring that they are advancing beyond all other peoples save the so-called Anglo-Saxons. It makes for readier comprehension and mutual respect if actual conditions are not glossed to thus mislead and so prejudice when the truth is that many generations of Brazilians must come and go before they outlive their heritage of racial predilection and mixed

Digitized by Google

blood. The new world Portuguese is by nature a retail shop keeper. He lacks the imagination of a pioneer; he is a bargainer over the counter,—not a builder. And a builder is what Brazil needs in her development.

The man who travels South America with open eye and mind comes away bearing patience for these descendants of a neglectful, wasteful motherland who are working out their salvation slowly but with surety.

South America has seen too many of Uncle Sam's sons who had left their country for its good, and of that type of tourist who struts and yaps and beats the tom-tom. It is no credit to our manners that to us should be almost exclusively applied in Latin-America the native word " gringo," which means any foreigner, but customarily is employed only in an uncomplimentary sense.

To the path breaker, wilderness South America offers a wonderplace of enigma and romance, whither, during the century following the first landing of Columbus, hastened the boldest adventurers, and those unexampled pioneers, the Jesuit Fathers, who, after one hundred and fifty years of beneficent labour among the Indians, were expelled by Spain because they dared to oppose slavery. The Fathers may have made bigoted Indians, but they made happy Indians—and by all means read Graham's Vanished Arcadia, if you would know the full story. While North America was yet an untrodden wild, Spain and Portugal were creating cities in Peru, Brazil, Venezuela, and all the world reverberated with stories of uncovered treasure.

Digitized by Google

It is one of the extraordinary phases of history that so much of this vast continent should have fallen from the world's ken, to again become for explorers the baffling, mystic land of which only the edges have been searched during modern times.

Of the Amazon and its southern tributaries much and extended research has been made; of the feeders from the north, however, considerably less, little indeed, is known.

Two men have supplied practically all the scientific world knows concerning the Amazon's largest northern tributary, the Rio Negro,—and that other great river which adjoins it in Venezuela—the Orinoco. To this day the famous English naturalist, Alfred R. Wallace, and the equally famous German naturalist, Alexander von Humboldt, continue in authority, undisplaced and unchallenged, although Wallace made his ascent of the Rio Negro and its tributary, the Uaupes, in 1849, while Humboldt explored the Orinoco in 1801–2.

Three or four years ago, Dr. Hamilton Rice, of Boston, made a descent of the Uaupes, in connection with other important research work to which he is giving notable devotion and intellection, but has not yet made any of his results public. More recently a German, Dr. Theodore Grunberg, spent a couple of years along the same river, called also Caiary-Upes, studying the Indians,—from which material he has published an important and informing book. The mere trip up or down either the Orinoco or the Rio Negro to the Casiquiare is nothing remarkable and has been done two or three times by adventuresome travellers, though I know of but one other,

Digitized by Google

Henry A. Wickham, to have left a permanent record of his achievement.

For the regions they visited, however, the books of Humboldt and Wallace are unrivalled—the only ones, in fact—while for the naturalist, the book of Henry Bates continues to be the undisputed classic of the Amazon, as does that of W. H. Hudson for the La Plata section, and Eugene Andre has made the most complete contribution on the lower Orinoco.

Finally, I feel constrained to apologize for the photographs which are so unsatisfactory because I could only leave my desk during the winter months—the rainy season in the tropics—and because, too, of the alternate steaming and soaking to which the films were subjected—a very small percentage coming out at all.

C. W.

New York, July 20, 1912.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	The Head of Navigation	15
II.	Tracking the Rio Negro	27
III.	Voyaging Overland	47
IV.	Hauling up the Rapids	64
V.	Ancient San Gabriel and its Forest Desert	73
VI.	By Uba to the Frontier	83
VII.	The Divide of the Flowing Road	98
VIII.	Through the Gateway of the El Dorado	112
IX.	To the Upper Orinoco via the Casiquiare	119
X.	On the Threshold of the Mystic Land	134
XI.	Beyond the Barrier	149
XII.	Among the Indios Bravos	162
XIII.	Under the Shadow of Duida	177
XIV.	Crossing the Great Cataracts	192
XV.	Racing the Lower Orinoco	199
XVI.	Sitting up for El Tigre	219
XVII.	Down the Portuguesa	247
XVIII.	Trailing after Jaguar	266
XIX.	Outfitting for Jungle Travel	290

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

The Cargo-boat of the Rio Negro.....*Frontispiece*
The Route of the Author over the Flowing Road..... 20
A Trader's Camp at Santa Isabel..... 22
A Campo and Bit of Forest Along the Amazon River..... 22
Working up River by the Pushing and Pulling Method..... 32
My Bateláo Tied to Characteristic Boulder..... 32
Hauling and Pushing Around the Rocks..... 42
The Uba Used on My Inland Trips off the Rio Negro..... 54
Author's Sketch Map of So-called Falls of Rio Negro..... 67
Hauling the Bateláo over the Rock at the Edge of Camanaos Rapids..... 70
The Mountain Sentinels on the Big Bay..... 74
My Personal Camp Alongside the Rapids at San Gabriel..... 74
We Receive Congratulations..... 78
The Native Dug-out Canoes of the Rio Negro..... 88
The Uba in Which I Journeyed..... 88
The Ancient Port of San Gabriel..... 88
An Instance of the Great Boulder Bank..... 100
Javita..... 106
My Camp on the Neck of Land..... 106
The Isolated Conical Mounts Rising out of the Flatland..... 116
The Indian Fish Trap of the Upper Negro..... 116
The Pestiferous Casiquiare..... 124
My Crew and Canoe up the Casiquiare..... 124
Boulders in the Upper Orinoco..... 142
A Woman of the Guainia..... 142
Making Ready to Cache our Belongings Before Crossing the Barrier..... 154
Camping in Luxury at Esmeralda..... 154
Indians West of Lake Maracaibo..... 170
The Great Cataracts of the Orinoco from an Old Spanish Map.. 182
At the Edge of the Encroaching Jungle..... 190
Beauty Unadorned on the Orinoco..... 190
On the Lower Orinoco..... 194

Digitized by Google

ILLUSTRATIONS

PAGE

The Ox-cart Packing my Outfit Overland at the Great Cataracts 194
In the Apure Delta Near Where the Apure and Orinoco Meet. 210
Typical House and Surroundings on the Lower Portuguesa..... 210
Crossing the Llanos..... 222
Getting the Packs Together..... 230
The Water Carrier..... 230
A Water-hole..... 236
During the Heat of the Day We Loafed..... 236
Alberto and Regulo Bringing in a Deer..... 244
The Simple House of the Venezuelan Llanero..... 244
San Fernando de Apure in the Rainy Season..... 260
The Gaucho in the Field..... 272
Pedro Brings in His Dug-out..... 280
On the Salado River..... 280
The Huge Wheeled Draught-carts of the Argentine Pampas..... 286
A Marble Hunting Knife..... 294
The Preston Mess Kit Assembled..... 294
The Preston Mess Kit and Half-Size Canteen in Detail..... 294
A Venezuelan Wayside Resting Place of the Best Class..... 296
The "Roorkee" Takedown Camp Chair..... 298
The Gold Medal Folding Cot..... 298

Digitized by Google

THE FLOWING ROAD

CHAPTER I

THE HEAD OF NAVIGATION

Santa Isabel, which was to be the beginning of my canoe journey to the Orinoco River, is about five hundred miles beyond Manaos and may be called the jumping-off place on the Rio Negro. Speaking more formally, it is head of navigation on this section of the flowing road, and likely to remain so for many years. Some folks might not call casual steamers navigation —thus to argue themselves untravelled in South America; but however my choice of word may be disputed, the fact remains that sooner or later the persevering, stern-wheel, little steamboat to which you commit yourself at Manaos puts you down at Isabel, the end of the journey.

If you are lucky enough to begin your travels in June, when the river is high, your arrival will be "sooner," but should you happen to set out upon your adventures in February, it will be "later." For it is one of the surprising phenomena of this riverful country that in the early stages of the rainy season even three feet of draught ascends the Rio Negro's broad, shallow course shiftingly, intermittently and only by help of the gifted native "práctico" (pilot), whose familiarity with the whims of the changing flood seems almost a species of second sight. In the height of the dry season the boat makes no attempt

Digitized by Google

to ascend the river, but remains anchored at Manaos, which town with its fifty thousand people is the most considerable inland port of Brazil. And, by the way, it is likewise the rubber clearing-house of South America, contrary to popular misconception regarding Para. I should add, also, that Manaos is nine miles above where the black water of the Rio Negro joins the yellowish Amazon, one thousand miles from the gaping mouth of this wonderful waterway. Here, from New York or Liverpool, you may come by the steamer which goes on to Iquitos, its final port in Peru, more than thirteen hundred miles farther up the Amazon.

And, speaking of the Amazon, let us pause a moment to consider this mighty river, with its source on the other side of South America in the very foothills of the Andes, three thousand miles to the west. Yet not its length or its depth makes it so notable among the world's great rivers as the volume of water discharged through its one-hundred-and-sixty mile opening upon the Atlantic—a volume so enormous as to colour the ocean nearly one hundred miles off shore!* Reaching forth over an area of two thousand miles east and west, by seventeen hundred north and south, its tributaries drain the upper one-third of all South America—a basin two-thirds the size of Europe. It will convey to you, more clearly than maps, an idea of the resources of this mother of rivers, to say that you can, with comparatively short

* Curiously there are no official figures. Estimates range from fifty to one hundred and eighty miles. Above Marajó Island, near mouth, thirty-five miles is accepted width of Amazon.

Digitized by Google

portages, make your way from the Caribbean Puerto Cabello, at the top of the continent, to Buenos Aires, at the mouth of the Rio de la Plata in the far south—a flowing road indeed!

Yet with all this supply, the current of the Amazon for half of the year is little more or less than four miles an hour, except at Obidos, five hundred miles up—the one point along the first one thousand miles where both banks of the Amazon can be seen at the same time. Here only a mile intervenes, through which narrowed passage the river crowds itself at a depth of one hundred and twenty fathoms.* Elsewhere, though variously reckoned at from six to fifteen miles, its width is difficult to estimate, but always, on either side, is the flanking of a dead-level country, accentuated by the clean-trunked, high-standing, and heavily buttressed ceibas, which lift their great bushy tops on high as though to escape the smother of forest blanket.

A cross section of this Amazonian blanket would show clean, high trunks, light gray predominating, surmounted by close-growing rounded tops, and palms that range from three inches to nearly as many feet in girth and are sometimes fruit laden. An exception to the clean trunk rule is a very graceful example, much the form of our own honoured elm. Draping the bushes on the bank is often a vine carrying yellow and white morning-glory-like blossoms, and once in a way you see a wistaria reaching from top to bottom of a sizable tree, while again a

---

* Opinions differ, the extreme claim being 270 fathoms. Passage is locally called Strait of Pauxis.

Digitized by Google

favouring wind may bring you delicious fragrance.

Preconceived notions of gorgeously hued winged life are destined, however, to disappointment on such a trip up the Amazon; not for lack of life but for lack of opportunity to see it. No dependable knowledge of a section and its life can be gained from the deck of a passing steamer; though none-the-less the steamer tourist has written many an article on South America—the most misrepresented and least known of our neighbours. It must be confessed even after closer scrutiny that the general outlook along this great river is unvarying and monotonous. For the first three hundred or four hundred miles the banks to the very water's edge, are low, covered by rank, dense bush and tree growth. Farther along they become higher and more definite, so that once in a day's travel, perhaps, you may round a point standing, say fifteen feet. For the most part, however, the so-called high banks may be eight or ten feet, and the average level nearer three feet. This is the conclusion of observations made in February at low water. In June, when the river is high, all the lower country and much of the upper becomes flood land, called " gapo," and only the highest banks are visible.

After five hundred to six hundred miles of up-river travel you come now and again to an opening or clearing, locally known as a " campo," which indicates an attempt at cattle raising, or may carry a planting of cacao—abandoned quite as often as not for the alluring rubber industry, which exacts much in deprivation and hard work but pays better. Such spots, however, are but occasional, and for the rest the heavy, gloomy forest reaches down to the water, impenetrable to the eye beyond thirty or forty feet.

Digitized by Google

You would hardly believe there could be scarcity of water along such a river system, but I was delayed at Manaos ten days while the anchored *Inca* awaited a rise in the Rio Negro; and to reach Santa Isabel required seven days of running from daylight until dark under the utmost skill of the práctico. Nor was there a day of the seven when we were free of strong wind and driving rain and lowering clouds, to churn the shoal water and darken the sky, thus adding to the difficulty of keeping the channel. Yet, the práctico never faltered, nor did we once touch bottom. Just in front of the unhoused wheel on the forward deck, signalling the steersman, sometimes himself seizing the spokes, but never speaking except now and again to the diligent lead-man (whose deepest record was twelve feet), so stood the pilot. Through the storms and into the dark of the early night he found the tortuous channel without mistake; twisting and turning, at times making hardly a half mile dead ahead. On every side, reaching to the horizon, the deep forest, unrelieved by the individual lofty trees of the Amazon, rimmed the water like a great hedge trimmed to evenness by some giant hand. Occasionally a strip of bright sandy beach, framed in vivid green, supplied needed contrast and emphasized the darkness of the enveloping woodland.

Of the Amazon's great feeders, each over a thousand miles in length, the Rio Negro, if not first in size, is certainly second, having two large contributing rivers of its own, the Branco on the north—extending six hundred miles up to the mountain barrier guarding southeast Venezuela—and the Uaupes on the west, that comes from the far Amazonian forests lining the base of the Cordilleras.

Digitized by Google

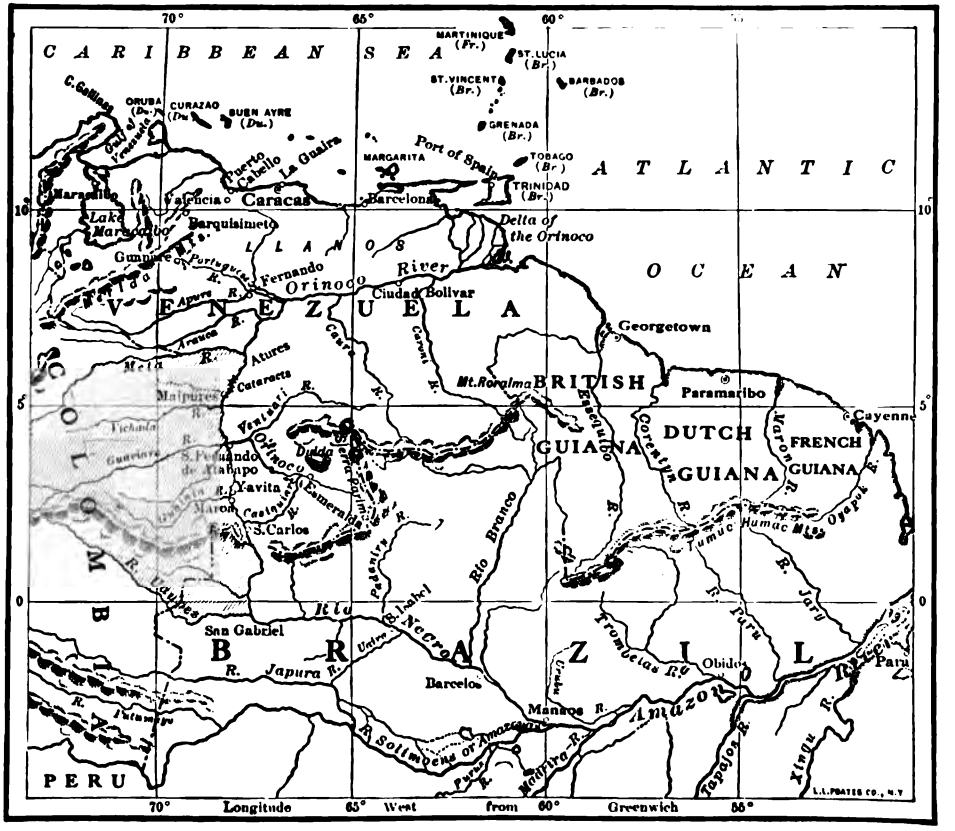
Just above Manaos the Rio Negro is from six to ten miles wide; beyond, for several hundred miles, it becomes an island-filled, heliotrope sea, with banks ranging from ten to twenty-five miles apart; all the islands heavily wooded, and one as much as thirty miles in length. Approaching Santa Isabel, itself an island, the Negro narrows to about five miles, and the first indication of up-river rock outcroppings is seen in the prevalence of granite beaches.

Whenever the *Inca* came to a high bank, always once and sometimes twice a day, we found a settlement of one-story, crudely built houses, usually to the number of two or three. In fact none had more than half a dozen, except Barcellos, which boasts forty of better structure, and is at once the oldest town on the river and the metropolis of the Negro above Manaos. Although they can raise anything, the truth is these people along the river above Manaos practically grow nothing, and are dependent almost entirely on the infrequent comings and goings of the one small steamboat. From the interior they get a little "caucho," as the second-grade rubber is called, just enough to tempt existence in these spots hewn out of the surrounding forest.

At such halts therefore the provisions were discharged for which the crew had been ransacking the cargo since perhaps the previous stop—the cargo having been dumped in at Manaos apparently without regard to destination.

Certainly the *Inca* looked the part of a first aid to the needy. Its two open decks overflowed. The entire lower one was filled with cattle, pigs, baled merchandise, and the engine—mostly the engine: the

Digitized by Google



THE ROUTE OF THE AUTHOR OVER THE FLOWING ROAD, FROM THE PORTUGUESA TO THE AMAZON. THE SHADED SECTION INDICATES WHERE THE LANDS OF FABLED EL DORADO LAY

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

upper was reserved for the passengers. Forward the practico and his helpers held their domain; in the centre the culinary department and a few cabins had been set up; while at the rear were two long tables on which the meals were served. In every otherwise unoccupied spot on the upper deck, were the highly coloured tin trunks so dear to the Brazilian heart, and the tin canisters (from three gallons to twice the capacity of a milk can) in which are carried sugar, coffee, and everything likely to be affected by the humid atmosphere. At night the second class passengers swung their sleeping hammocks over the cattle; the first class swung theirs along the sides of the upper deck and over the tables. Looking astern from the centre you encountered a vista of protruding bare feet, with much soiled soles. The out of town Brazilian wears shoes on occasions only; shoes indeed constitute a sign of distinction for the man as do stockings for the woman. What a tiara is in New York, stockings are to up-country Brazil; and when in rural South America the female of the species attains to drawers—she is entitled to be classed close to the aristocracy.

There were about a dozen of us on the upper deck, except myself all Brazilian traders in rubber, who kept to their hammocks most of the time when the rain did not drive them huddling among the tin cans, and who maintained long distance discussions in voices loud and unceasing. Some of them gave a realistic touch to the domestic scene by slam banging around the deck in shoes from which the counter and all the upper save only the toe had been cut! They were punctilious to the last degree in the form of

Digitized by Google

addressing one another, but at table 'twas the devil take the hindmost; and a pretty alert devil he'd need to be at that! My favourite and peaceful retreat for reading was under the feed box of a couple of cows near the paddle wheel.

Thus we came to the head of navigation with the wind blowing a gale, the rain drilling us through and through, and everybody on board yapping except the práctico, who was attending strictly to the no easy business of avoiding a huge uprooted tree, which swirled threateningly in the current around us.

When the storm had passed, Santa Isabel, a rock and sand island, unfolded itself. Eight houses, a score of long-legged pigs, and children to the combined number of men, women, houses, and pigs, comprised the colony at this first view. But as I lingered at its boulder-strewn gates the population increased with the opening of the wet season by twenty or more rubber-laden canoes and bateláos—for Santa Isabel is the rubber headquarters of the "alto" (upper) Rio Negro. Here the Indian "caucheros" in their dugouts and the Brazilian traders in their cargo boats bring the small amount of rubber gathered along this river and its many branches; and here, by the *Inca* from Manaos, come supplies and the agents who bargain for the season's catch.

Those prone to class all South Americans as indolent should peruse the workaday life-story of the average cauchero who, with food necessarily scant and unnourishing because of the conditions of travel and climate, penetrates far into the most unhealthy sections where rubber is to be found at its best, and for months at a time searches

Digitized by Google

A TRADER'S CAMP AT SANTA ISABEL ON THE RIO NEGRO AMONG THE ROCKS

A CAMPO AND CHARACTERISTIC BIT OF FOREST ALONG THE AMAZON RIVER

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

the tropical hotbed, returning with the raw fruits of his labour but once a year, for a brief respite, at the source of supplies. Should the expedition fail to locate rubber in profitable quantity he finds himself heavily burdened with debt, perhaps ruined beyond repair. Of all pioneering, I know of none where life is so drear, or the work more exhausting or beset by such discomfort.

I never cease to marvel at the costly improvidence of these frontier people. In the far North where dogs and sledges constitute the only means of winter transportation, I found it most difficult to secure an additional train; while on the Rio Negro, where the flowing road is the only road, canoes, and especially men, for hire are as exceptional as sunshine in the rainy season. I had brought with me on the *Inca* provisions to last the four or five hundred miles* canoe trip to San Carlos, frontier post of Venezuela, where, I was assured, I could replenish them, but at Santa Isabel I expected to engage canoes and men for the journey. That none were to be had despite Manaos assurance to the contrary, was a rude shock at the very outset, even though not entirely unforeseen. And if I may be permitted the aphorism, I should like to add, that in wilderness journeying one will extract more comfort from invariably expecting the unforeseen. Experience has taught me alas! how little dependence may usually be placed on the information of the interior offered at frontier towns, and I

* This is an estimate based on our rate of progress which is true of all the other distances given in this book. Actual figures are unobtainable. Thirty-six days were consumed in actual travel from Santa Isabel to San Carlos.

Digitized by Google

was not greatly surprised later to find no provisions at San Carlos or my gun and fish-line necessary to eating en route.

Since Santa Isabel is the point of communication between the outside world and all that vast interior reaching far to the west and north—even to one gateway of fabled El Dorado—it required several fruitless days of urgent searching to convince me the scarcity of means of travel was actual rather than professed. I was indeed on the point of despair when I had the good fortune to meet and interest in my behalf Netto, a young Brazilian, whose English was about on a par with my Portuguese. Even with his kindly help it was impossible to secure a canoe, though I finally did engage passage on a trading freight-bateláo to San Gabriel, at the great rapids, sometimes called the Falls of the Rio Negro.

Pending its start, we went two days up-river heralded at every turning by the vigorous blowing of a not unmusical concho, to a beautifully situated point from which the view of the Negro and its banks was extended and most attractive.

On this commanding site lived Netto with his wife —an alluring young native whose beauty was rather enhanced by informal skirt and stockingless feet,— and her mother, in a long, low adobe, which the dogs and goats and the ducks shared on easy terms with the family. Here were a man and his wife who had been to Paris—the Mecca of all South Americans—who were, as country Brazilians go, educated, and yet, who wear no stockings, live like peasants, and whose sense of propriety was not offended by Netto placing before me, on the evening

Digitized by Google

of my arrival, and while we sat in a circle—his wife, mother and a number of other women and I—a certain toilet article common enough to the civilized world, but rare beyond the frontier. Netto, by the manner in which he bore and placed it within our midst, no doubt was extremely proud of its possession, and brought it forth to impress me with his and his family's superiority over the common herd.

These people were representative of the better country class, simple in their habits of living perhaps, but kind to their dependents and courteous beyond need to the voyaging stranger. My few days at their house were happily and instructively occupied. In addition to making personal acquaintance with several, I gained knowledge of the birds and fish and products of the country that afterwards proved of much service to me. To my taste nothing on either Amazon or Rio Negro equals the flesh of the "tortuga" (turtle), and the "peixeboe," or cowfish, as the manati is known in Portuguese. The turtle in varying sizes and a few edible species is common on most of the large waterways north of the Amazon; it is really toothsome, more so than the manati, the meat of which is not unlike pork in flavour. Both are cut up, fried in their own fat, and marketed in cans, a manati yielding sometimes as much as fifty gallons of oil, whereas often the oil of two turtles is necessary for the preservation of one.

Of fish there are many kinds, every waterway appearing to have its individual varieties, but one called "pirarucu," or "lou lou," according to locality is common to all the Rio Negro, and a staple food among the Indians, notwithstanding the Brazilians

Digitized by Google

look upon scaleless fishes, such as it is, with aversion, claiming their flesh conduces to the fever. The most toothsome fish I caught averaged about a foot in length, and bore lake trout markings. The curassow family is rather a large one through this section and all of its members are good eating. Strange enough, no fruit is to be seen from Manaos to Santa Isabel, but at Boa Vista, as Netto's locality is called, were oranges, lemons, "avocados" (alligator pear), bananas, mangoes. In fact, they could have any kind they cared to plant—not to mention the breadfruit, which grows wild but must be cooked before eating. There were also several fruit-bearing palms besides the tucuman, and the assahy, from the cherry-like berries of which an excellent wine is made, by the way. All palm fruits yield an oil which is used in cooking fish, the Brazilian being very fond of grease.

Here also is the country "where the nuts come from," meaning particularly the Brazil nut, which, perhaps, it may interest you to learn, does not grow solitary in its husk like our own less prolific nuts, but with true tropic temperament, in this case also artistic, in groups of a dozen or more housed so compacted within a cocoanut shell-like globe that once you have taken them out you are unable to get more than two-thirds of them back again. These hang near the ends of long open limbs on a large-girthed, wide-spreading tree which towers a hundred feet, and is altogether one of the most attractive in Brazil.

Small excuse indeed for the denizens of this land to go hungry, and yet, strange to say, many of them lead a miserable half-fed existence.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER II

TRACKING THE RIO NEGRO

It is upwards of three hundred miles from the head of navigation to San Gabriel, and not many of the miles are free of rapid water; rapid water which develops into cataracts on the slightest provocation of turning river or obtruding rock, and a current that ranges five and six miles to a pace impossible to stem by paddles alone.

If you would read this tale with interest and understanding keep in your mind's eye a picture of this Rio Negro. From Manaos to Santa Isabel it is, as I have said, substantially a great inland sea, ten to twenty-five miles in width, filled with islands that seem floating, so low do they set in the water.

At Santa Isabel you come to the first rock obstruction, after which the character of the river changes to become a succession of long island-filled bays, while the width from bank to bank is reduced to an average of four or five miles, sometimes more, occasionally less. Now and again great boulder islands cut the river into several very rapid sections which try the soul and muscles of the voyager. The forest lining the banks differs little from that below Santa Isabel. It is the same dense, evenly trimmed, hedge-like covering, with none of the campos or the single great trees looming as on the Amazon, but now the points extending into the Negro are as often as not rock instead of brush covered—usually boulder-like—sometimes a single large flat rock.

Digitized by Google

Two or three times you come to a palm-thatched house or two of a trader, to whom the Indians of the many tributary streams entering the Negro from both north and south bring caucho.

Throughout the length of the flowing road canoes are of few types but of many names. The bateláo, varying from twenty-five to forty feet in length, with crews of from four to a dozen, is the long-journey cargo boat, corresponding in some of its phases to the "lancha" of Venezuela. In both countries it has a comparatively deep cockpit, covered, sometimes for half its length, sometimes wholly, with a barrel-shaped, thatch house—"toldo"—and is built of planks around a crude but strong framework, to withstand that hardest of usage, navigation among the rocks of the rapids. High up on the Guainia, a species of crude bark craft obtains, but elsewhere the canoe of the Indian is always a dugout, known as "uba" in Brazil, and "canoa," or "curiara" or "bongo" in Venezuela, varying in width amidships from eighteen inches to four feet, and from a dozen or fifteen feet to as much as thirty or forty feet in length. One I measured at Santa Isabel was fifty-two feet long, fashioned out of a single tree. Incidentally I found it somewhat curious that a Brazilian Indian when alone in a small uba often paddles from the bow rather than from the stern, as is the customary method among most native watermen elsewhere. Far inland the uba, fitted with toldo, is also the long-journey boat, but on the lower reaches of the Rio Negro and the Amazon and the Orinoco, one, two, or three board ribs are added to its gunwale, and the craft becomes respectively "montaria" among the Portuguese, and "falca" among the Spanish

Digitized by Google

speaking peoples. The common boat of this description carries one twelve-inch board rib atop its dugout gunwale, and is from twenty to twenty-five feet long.

Paddles are very much of a type with short, heart-shaped to roundish heads, which are decorated in primal colours with lines or squares or other simple forms, as individual fancy dictates. Handles vary in length with the size of dugout, except on the lower Orinoco and Rio de la Plata, where the rough water requires always a longer handle as well as a larger blade. On the upper Orinoco beyond Esmeralda I found a very distinct heart-shaped unpainted blade, made of a beautiful wood, which glistened in the water like burnished gold.

The large bateláo is propelled by oars from atop the toldo or from its deck when smaller, or by tracking and poling. It all depends on the character of the river and whether your course is up or down stream. In going down stream you keep the middle of the river to enjoy the full force of the current as you float, or perhaps sail along with a little easy paddling or rowing to hold direction and secure extra speed. That is the luxury of river travel; but going up is quite another story. In the middle of the river it is impossible to make way against the current, so you cling to the bank, following faithfully all the turns of a much turning river, except where a deep bay tempts a crossing—and you pull your heart out before reaching the bank again. Only on the first stretch of the lower Orinoco where its course is west may upstream work be lightened; here the summer trade winds from the Atlantic often make sailing possible as far as Caicara, where the river turns south.

The very slow pace of the bateláo was maddening

Digitized by Google

to me at first, I confess, despite the novel method of propulsion, but when a later acquired small uba provided means for exploring the many "caños,"—the back water canals made by the rising river and the tributaries coming in from the north bank to which we clung,—I found the thirty-four days' journey to San Gabriel after I became the supercargo of the bateláo (March 9th) none too long. No day was without its interest. Nothing, however, relieved or shortened the nights. The rain, which we did not so much mind in the day, because it clouded the otherwise blistering sun, even if it failed to cool the atmosphere, made sleeping a dispiriting series of catnaps, with alternate boat bailing and clothes wringing. Rain or shine, however, we were off always at daylight, and, though we kept going until an hour or so after dark, as conditions permitted, we never at our fastest made over twenty miles a day, and I doubt if our average exceeded fifteen.

My crew of nine Indians were all from above San Gabriel, but of several types; one Negroid, another Semitic, others of the lank variety which appears to predominate in this section.

Alleo, the " patrón " or captain of the crew, was a wizened little man about sixty years of age, and scarcely five feet five inches in height or one hundred and twenty-five pounds in weight, but when he squatted I never saw body of man hang so straight from the knees without touching ground. Sometime during an excess of artificial joy he had lost the top section of his left ear, but he was obviously proud of the two or three tufts of hair decorating his upper lip. Also he sported a felt hat jammed over a straw one,

Digitized by Google

as well as a rather frisky shirt cut off midway to the loin-cloth he wore when it rained, but replaced at other times by the cotton jumper-shirts and overalls with which the men clothed themselves fully in clear weather. Clothes, I may add, were valued chiefly as protection against the sun; whenever it rained they were carefully tucked away under the toldo.

Alleo was a steersman with convictions; he stood with one foot on top of the toldo supporting his weight, the other guiding the tiller, while one hand emphasized his brief directions and the other searched his anatomy for insects. Because of his expressive hands and badgering inflection, I always wished to understand what Alleo said to his men, but they chattered a patois of which I could catch no meaning. He never relaxed a stern countenance at these moments; nor by any chance allowed himself to be drawn into argument. His orders were curt and decisive. He was always an alert and rakish figure outlined atop the toldo, far and away the best man in the boat—in fact one of the most competent steersmen I met on the flowing road.

Yeggo was the fisherman of the party, and long after the others had turned in at night, the swish of his line could be heard. He baited by preference with a mantis—a four or five inch "walking-stick" grasshopper kind of creature, which turned a round head on a long neck and fixed me rather eerily with prominent eyes as I sought to catch it. When I failed he used farinha,* and appeared quite as suc-

* Also called mandioca—the native meal or flour.

Digitized by Google

cessfully to hook a one or two pound gray-and-black trout-shaped fish, with dark, bulging eyes. As a worker, however, Yeggo did not shine. He was forever cutting capers on the bateláo, often indeed to our loss of a point rounded after hardest struggling. Nor did Yeggo rate high as to looks, with his bridgeless nose, close-set eyes, and file-pointed teeth showing through a cavernous mouth. In common with so many others, his legs and hands bore the white-spotted souvenirs of the prevalent skin disease. His dearest possession seemed to be a dirty straw hat several sizes too small, which, therefore, was ever falling from his head and being replaced to fall again at his first strenuous movement.

And whenever we were hardest pressed, Yeggo invariably lost that irritating hat, always letting go the pulling-rope to recover it, no matter how much we needed his weight on the line. One day I took him with me on an inland trip and lost the hat—as you will learn in a subsequent chapter.

The best-looking Indian type on the boat was Ramon, who, among a broad-footed people, had the broadest feet I ever beheld, and used them on the ropes almost as readily as his hands. Save this man, none of the crew stood more than five feet six inches in height, or weighed over one hundred and fifty pounds; but they all had round, full stomachs, due no doubt to frequent and heavy mandioca feeding, and so at least looked well nourished. Neither this lot of men, however, nor any others I had on the flowing road, were impressive as to physique.

It is a fallacy that wilderness people are necessarily robust merely because they lead a simple life. The

Digitized by Google

WORKING UP RIVER BY THE PUSHING AND PULLING METHOD

MY BATELAO TIED TO THE CHARACTERISTIC GRANITE BOULDER OUTCROPPING ALONG THE NEGRO. THE INDIAN IN THE FOREGROUND CARRIES A PUSHING POLE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

truth is they are not robust, so far as my experience goes along the waterways of South America from the Rio de la Plata of the Argentine to the Portuguesa of Venezuela, though they are patient and enduring. Alternate stuffing and fasting, and exposure, are not the builders of rugged constitutions. Fish, dried meat in the sections within reach of supplies, and mandioca, or farinha as the Brazilians call it, may be declared the staple food of the Indian from Venezuela to the Argentine. There are seasons and regions when and where water-fowl, the widely distributed curassow family, the agouti, or other members of the extensive rodent tribe, contribute to their food supplies. There are also places and times where and when they must resort to eating snakes, lizards, and vermin. But for the greater time they feed on fish and mandioca—the bran-like meal which is made from the root of a yucca plant. Tourists that venture no farther than the comfortable ports are apt to indulge themselves in ill-natured, unfair and uncomprehending comment on these unhappily situated people because of their lack of the finer qualities and generous impulses: how can such attributes be expected of a man whose entire life is occupied in ceaseless struggle merely to keep alive?

They work fitfully, and their casual methods would inflame one unaccustomed to travel in the tropics. For instance, on my bateláo, in the midst of hauling through rapids, one of the crew was just as apt as not to let go the rope to make a cigarette or hunt for vermin or inspect a cut toe. Of fourteen men I used on one occasion in the rapids, four were engaged taking in on two ropes, four in putting the

Digitized by Google

cable aboard the uba—leaving six who were doing the actual pulling. And though a man might "soldier" patently and constantly, yet none of the others objected. For example, the stern-port oar on the small bateláo in which we journeyed from Santa Isabel to the home of my new-found Brazilian friend, was constantly stopping to study his toes or to dig an insect from under his skin—but no one protested though the going was very hard and the crew small. Not even Netto called him to order: the other Indians laughed; Netto ate raisins. Such is rapid transit in Brazil.

My bateláo was large and heavily laden, and we progressed by a species of tracking, and by pulling and pushing along the forest-lined bank—a method of poling peculiar to the flowing road. Seven of the crew remained on the boat, Alleo, of course, at the tiller, and two—changed daily, for it was much the easiest task—scouted ahead in the uba for rocks or points to which the hauling-cable could be attached. Thus six men were always on the poles, divided equally as pullers and pushers. The puller used a thirty-foot pliable pole having a natural hook at the far end; it was his business to fasten to some limb ahead, and, by walking down the length of the bateláo, so help drag us forward. The pusher used a twenty-foot stiffer pole terminating in a short, stout fork, which by preference he fixed against the river bottom when he could reach it, or seated it against a limb of a passing tree. Sometimes as a pusher set his weight on the pole he went overboard amid the united shouts of the crew; and often there was a voluntary scramble into the water to capture a marsupial rodent, somewhat larger

Digitized by Google

than a big prairie-dog and fair eating, which had been hooked out of a tree.

Frequently, too, there was a general plunge into the river by all hands to escape the attack of a vicious black-and-yellow-striped wasp which attacked with the speed of lightning and the ferocity of a tiger. Nor was it to be evaded; you could only protect your eyes with your hands, and, for the rest, take what was coming, rejoicing that its habit is not to linger, but to sting in passing—a sting, I may add, which is like the touch of a glowing-hot needle. Having been stung one afternoon into a reckless retaliatory humour, I routed a colony and secured its house—a light gray earthen cylinder, one and a half inches in diameter by four in height—which sat upright on the limb of a tree.

Not all my crew were skilful, yet one was a master. Standing at the bow, he handled his pole like a six-ounce trout-rod, never failing to land upon an overhanging limb at just the moment necessary to draw the bow shoreward as it turned out-stream because of slovenly work of some pusher walking astern. Here is the real skill in this kind of locomotion—to keep the boat going comparatively straight ahead, instead of swinging in and out in response to the individual efforts of the pole-men. I have seen this particular man hook on to roots under water not visible to my eye, or on to a log floating just below the surface, as does so much of the heavy tropic driftwood. To decide at once, to hook instantly, to move as an endless chain down the shore side and up the stream side is what makes a good tracking crew and keeps the boat going.

And not the least necessity to fair bateláo progress

Digitized by Google

is honest work by the scouts in the uba who have unexcelled opportunities for loafing, and can easily make a difference one way or the other of several miles in the day's score. The uba carries about one hundred yards of stout three-inch cable (made, as is all rope in this country, of the piassava fibre) which the scouts fasten to an advantageous point where the water is swift, or to the far bank of a bay, paddling back with the other end as fast as they can to the approaching bateláo, where the men simply walk it in. This is a much swifter method than poling and may raise the pace to two miles the hour. Occasionally on stretches where neither pole nor cable could be used we were obliged to resort to the oars, and then our rate of travel fell to the lowest, or scarcely a mile an hour. Except when toiling up through the rapids, the heavily forested banks enabled us to employ the combined poling and hauling, by which we averaged at the best about one and a half miles.

Whatever the method of progression, these Rio Negro Indians were usually cheerful; the best-natured people I ever fell among. They were always ready with a laugh, often singing at their work—if the rain was not too severe; like children, as, indeed, most wilderness people are. If one of the crew missed an overhanging limb and fell into the river, if the uba was caught under the cable and upset, the others indulged in raillery. If the boat swung around at a rapid or broke away, requiring extra effort to repair the damage, every one laughed as he set to the task. Had they, however, promptly jumped into the breach and laughed afterward, we would have made better time on the long journey at less expense of bodily effort. They had good

Digitized by Google

nature and patience in plenty, but more alertness and instant application of energy would have given less need of patience. Their way was to laugh while they viewed the barrel roll down-hill, and then set to work rolling it up again, rather than to check its flight at the top of the hill.

In a broad sense they are of the Tupi family, though so crossed with other Indians, Portuguese, Brazilians, and negroes as to have lost nearly all tribal traditions and customs. As a rule, they bring no highly developed skill to their handiwork—the possibilities of the poling are only half realized, save in exceptional cases. Although in individual cases clever beyond comparison in handling canoes at the cataracts with which the rivers are all plentifully supplied, they appear in general to take no pride in expertness with the implement by which they travel or secure food that corresponds to the American Indian's esteem of paddle skill, or the Canadian Indian's regard for speed on snow-shoes or dexterous handling of dogs. On the river they are not to be mentioned in the same breath with those consummate watermen of Malaya and Siam. A little effort and a heavy dependence on luck—that's about their gait. Often we ran on rocks which should have been easily avoided by men whose life's work is the handling of boats. Daily in rounding boulder points in rapid water, the bow was permitted to swing out on a carelessly slack and unattended rope, sometimes resulting in the escape of the boat and subsequent disaster among the rocks; while in getting out of difficulties there was a surprising lack of intelligently applied skill.

Big as the bateláo was, it had no room for a

Digitized by Google

supercargo. The days for the most part I spent exploring the interior; the nights aboard among the loud-smelling pirarucu—how I loathed the odour of that fish as the journey lengthened! My days on the boat, as few as possible you may be sure, were chiefly occupied in dodging either the poles or the tree branches which raked us fore and aft as we clung to the bank, or the wasps and the ants that often swept upon us in swarms. And whenever we sought the easier going of a narrower channel, as for example between an island and the river bank, always the insect life became more active.

The forest continued the same dense hedge. Sometimes where the bank was exposed, slender pendants screened the view in running loops or hung straight to the ground from the tree-limbs to take root and send forth their own little shoots—for tropical nature is opposed to the unit. I found it very interesting. My favourite lookout was on top the forward end of the toldo, where, flat on my stomach, with hands and feet braced against the framework, I managed to keep from being torn off by the branches about half the time—Alleo quite approving my position, as much of the insect life was thus deposited on me before reaching him. When not engaged in thus holding on for dear life to my perch, I watched, if the sun shone, for birds and butterflies, and studied the small, stingless, yellow bees—called " angelitos " (little angels) by the Venezuelans, which settled in hundreds on the piassava cable hung across the toldo.

I was surprised not to see more birds on the banks,

Digitized by Google

though when the sky was clear always some voices were heard issuing from the jungle as we passed, and rarely were the voices pleasing. There is one bird inhabitant of river Brazil, however, that makes up for the song delinquencies of many others; this is the japim,* a liquid-noted, black member of the oriole family, with a yellow back, yellow eye and whitish bill. These birds build in colonies a fourteen to sixteen inch grass woven pendent pouch (entered near the bottom on the side), and I have seen a tree nigh full of their swaying nests, which sometimes are even two feet or more in length. They are pert and active and busy music makers, with an ever-changing song which takes on the notes of many neighbours,—for the japim is an excellent mimic. Among his virtues is a penchant for the young of the wasp with the electric stinger.

I remarked as we moved along upon the many whistling notes sounding inland—one a short, sharp explosion, followed by a kind of catbird call. A bluish gray bodied kingfisher twice the size of our common variety I saw often, and a dashing figure he made, with a white slashing encircling his throat. At dusk, and only at dusk, unless it was raining, I almost invariably saw on the Rio Negro a brown bird having white splotches on neck and shoulder, and a hawk-like

---

* This is the cassique (*Cassicus persicus*), very generally distributed in South America, north of the Amazon, but not to be mistaken for the Central American troupial, which is not a hang-nest; or confused with the common yellow oriole of black back and dark bill and eye.

Digitized by Google

head, which was accompanied by another I never could see that gave voice to a plaintive three-note song, so unusual in its soft melody as to arrest attention and please mightily.

You half see so many things and hear so much of which you would learn more;—that's the exasperation of such journeying.

The really interesting bird display is inland, those on the river being largely the parrots, constantly in the air, and striking in colour combinations—one had a blue back and wings and yellow breast—but noisy to distraction; the brilliant macaws in their reds and greens and blues and yellows, always in pairs and flying fast and high; and an occasional toucan—a recluse that seeks the denser foliage—with its ungainly great yellow bill and black and green body. Like the elephant, the parrot and its entire family, including the screaming little brother parrakeets, are very destructive eaters, wasting much more than they consume. They are all fairly palatable, but the macaws require a lot of boiling, as the flesh is tough beyond anything on two legs.

At sundown a long, doleful bird whistle is heard; parrots chatter noisily until dusk falls; and then the frogs take up their refrain.

The butterflies were lovely beyond description. and I luxuriated in their glory on my inland trips as well as on sunshiny days from the toldo, even though their presence meant scorching heat. The air was full of them. From a tiny yellow to a superb purple as large as my hand, they fluttered hither and yon, in all sizes and of every colour—noticeably in shades of blues and yellows and reds—very yellow yellows,

Digitized by Google

burning scarlets, lustrous blues, and velvet purples. An entire insect might be solid scarlet, or blue, or yellow, with slight markings of contrasting colours. One I caught was a golden yellow throughout; another was a deep crimson with under wings a paler shade and black lines crossing the body; another was all white save for a blue circle on each wing. How often I regretted not bringing a hand-net!

One day I spied a beauty on the water where it had been knocked from a limb by the passing bateláo. In reaching for it I fell into the river, and when I had swum within arm's-length, it righted itself and flew away. Except for one other I found on the upper Orinoco, it was the most brilliant of the countless host of beauties. Its body was a deep purple with black and gold markings, the under wings of a light or sky blue. Some handsome moths of large size were also in evidence. One I caught had a body over two inches in length, scarlet wings with deeper self markings and a kind of gray colouring underneath. A great resplendent darning-needle zigzagged frequently among the butterflies, and always when the sun shone, and for as long as it shone, there sounded the metallic singing of a cicada, which shrieked unceasingly, like an axle revolving a thousand times a minute and screeching for oil.

The temperature, by-the-way, ranged from 88° to 96° in the coolest spot I could place my thermometer on the bateláo of bright days, and 110° to 120° in the sun. Under clouded skies the mercury stood at 90° in the day, and, at night, about 80°. It is noteworthy, too, that at this registry a penetrating chill in the air before dawn made a very light

Digitized by Google

blanket comfortable, in addition to light flannel pajamas. Inland the mercury rarely fell below 85° during the night, and frequently remained at 88° or even 90°. On such nights the insects held high carnival—and every member of the South American insect world is a militant member.

While nothing like so plentiful on the black, vegetable-stained rivers as on the yellowish or white ones, the insects which frequent the Rio Negro appear to be a choice stinging lot, even though they are in truth indifferent workmen by comparison with those of the upper Orinoco and the Casiquiare. The demon of the Negro is a busy gnat of several sizes called "pium." Unlike the wasp of swift attack, the pium comes without warning and to remain. You may kill it, but your trouble is brewing none the less in the tiny blood dot marking the scene of its feast. Of insect visitations, however, the ants were perhaps the most troublesome. With and without wings, harmless and vicious, ashore and afloat—they came upon us in active myriads. On occasion the bateláo and the toldo, inside and out, would be so literally covered that we had to tie up and all hands clear—and clean—ship.

We made long days, turning out before dawn at six o'clock and starting with little delay, as the Indians made breakfast on a "cuia" (gourd) of farinha, and I on coffee straight, if it were not raining. This would carry us to midday, when, some time between twelve and two, usually there was a let-up in the rain, and we would have our one real meal of the day, consisting of coffee, dried fish and rice. Then we'd travel on until dark, about six-thirty, unless the sky

Digitized by Google

HAULING AND PUSHING AROUND THE ROCKS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

was free of rain clouds, when we'd go on an hour or two longer. No fire was made night or morning if it rained, and we fared off farinha, which needs but a little cold water to prepare it for eating. When the day had been exceptionally hard or wet I generally gave the men a small horn of cachaca—as the native rum is called—to fortify their heart and warm their rain soaked bodies. Likewise I found the potion most persuasive in inducing to urgent effort. Indeed a bit of cachaca for the man, and a little bottle of perfume for the woman will open a way where money, entreaty or threats are unavailing. I always carried a demijohn of this rum among my stores, and found it, together with a plentiful supply of tobacco, of inestimable service in trading.

When the sun shone the glare from the reflecting black river was blinding. On clear nights the stars were mirrored in the Negro as in a Claude Lorraine glass.

Thus from bush to tree, from rock to root, pulling, hauling, poling, most of the time in the rain, we worked our way from point to point, from island to island. Usually we tied up for the night along the bank, where the insects love to dwell and the anvil chorus of the frogs swells its loudest; but when we could we camped on a point of rocks or sand, to secure some relief from the pests. Often we encountered stretches of rocks and rapids extending entirely across the river, where our only way of advancing beyond such obstruction was by hauling from boulder to boulder, sometimes thus crossing to the opposite bank and back again in the same arduous, time-consuming manner. It was slow work, and it

Digitized by Google

was hard work, and once we nearly ended our river journey in the midst of such a crossing.

We had been all day toiling through this going, under continuous rain, and had come finally, long after dark, to a forty or fifty foot squarish rock-and-sand island in the middle of the river where it made a sharp bend and sped away for a mile or more over a boulder-filled bed. Here, on the down-stream side, we dragged the uba onto a diminutive sand beach and tied the bateláo alongside, probably not over five miles from where we had started at daylight. It was a picturesque camp; the stars shone brilliantly after a day of storm and clouds, and on all sides loomed the dark, unbroken line of forest. The crew had spent the early part of the evening seated ashore around a feeble fire of driftwood making coffee and jabbering, smoking and laughing, while a cloud of insects, revealed intermittently by the flickering flame, played round them as a halo. Early they had subsided, however worn by the day's work. I could hear their sonorous breathing as I lay on the odoriferous pirarucu aboard the bateláo watching the Southern Cross slowly right itself. Once in a while a shooting-star, of which I saw many night by night, dropped into the far horizon, while on either side of us the water swirled and chirruped and danced past in the vigorous gladness of a rising and broken river.

Alternately straining on its painter and bumping against the rock to which it was fastened, the bateláo was scarcely a slumber cradle, so I needed no awakening when a violent bang brought me up standing; and the next instant I was trying to check the loosed bow which was swinging down-stream. But the only

Digitized by Google

pole on board was a push-pole, of no service for hooking and holding, and by the time I rushed astern I could not touch bottom though I could easily have jumped ashore. Meanwhile the boat was going out and swinging rapidly to the current, which, luckily indeed, was so swift and strong that it had turned the bow quite around by the time I reached the tiller and set up a hurricane yelling to arouse the Indians, who were sleeping comfortably, unaware of my hurried, not to say disturbing, departure from our island camp.

To my first startled look down-stream it appeared a river of boulders, and as we sped lurchingly toward them, I was almost overwhelmed at the thought of the momentous task confronting me. Was my carefully planned trip to end in this wreck? Of course a swamped boat in that torrent meant lost provisions, and lost provisions meant a retreat to Manaos, and abandonment of the project for that year at all events. The bare suggestion of such a disastrous possibility was certain to demoralize or to steady with nerves of steel; fortunately it steadied. My first impulse was to work shoreward, but after I felt the strength of the river, which hurled the boat onward like a chip, I prayed only that I might steer safely and keep thought of the dire consequences of failure from putting me in a blue funk.

Meanwhile the bateláo was tearing along, swaying from side to side as I put up or jammed down the tiller to overcome its tendency to slide off the course. Twice we narrowly escaped being flung on big boulders where the water swirled at their base, and several times the scraping of the bottom raised my hair—the

Digitized by Google

while we careened and plunged in the half-light which conjured shapes fantastic and awesome and confusing to my straining, dreading eyes. At last I could hear the beat of paddles, and a joy wave lifted me as I realized the Indians were overtaking us, and my course nearly run with success. On the moment of the thought came the harsh warning of a scraping bow—which I heeded by putting the tiller hard over—followed instantly by a sudden stop and a swerve which sent me over the side into the water, to be swept away before I scarce could comprehend what had happened.

That current was too strong for me to breast, but before it carried me down I was thankful to see the bateláo held fast, and that the uba and the Indians were near-by. Sweeping me along without ceremony, the river demanded my best efforts to keep it from battering me against the rocks, and no small struggle ensued before I finally pulled myself out on a slippery boulder in mid-stream, quite a mile below the boat, which itself was two miles from camp. Here the Indians found me at daylight.

By noon we floated the bateláo, which providentially had run upon a flat, sloping rock, and by the close of day had recovered the lost ground and were again tied up, this time on the other side of the rock-island whence I had begun my exciting flight the night before.

Why had we broken loose? Oh, Yeggo had fastened the boat with a piassava tie-rope, of which two of its four strands were severed! Thereafter I never turned in without giving the moorings personal inspection.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER III

VOYAGING OVERLAND

Travel was growing more difficult. In gaining half of the forty-five feet which marks the extremes between low water in December and high water in June, the river had so strengthened its already stout current that we could scarcely make one mile the hour, while the contributary streams coming in from the north flung themselves upon us with added force and pace, as we laboriously hauled and paddled across their mouths. But if the rapidly rising Negro was making more arduous our progress with the bateláo, it was also lending success to my inland canoe trips by increasing the number and volume of the "igarapees"* and generously overflowing the contiguous land, so as to afford me opportunity of penetrating farther and farther into the jungle.

To really see the marvellous fecundity and intricacy of its vegetable life, one must pass behind the half-concealing drop curtain nature hangs along the river bank. Of such opportunity I took full advantage. Sometimes through a passage not over six feet wide, opening directly off the swirling, noisy river, I passed through the dense overhanging growth at the bank into submerged woodland where reigned the oppressive silence of primeval forest; now a little river, after many windings and cross canals, led finally to a lagoon whose shores teemed with bird life; yet again the igarapee widened and narrowed and

* A canal in Brazil; same as caño in Venezuela.

Digitized by Google

widened once more, twisting through forest and campo to end far inland in pond or perhaps continue on to another, or even two or three such expansions before running its length. And all the while, whether the road was narrow or wide, or across lagoon or along igarapee, it led through a wonderland, where the flora amazed, and the small reptilia scurried hither and yon as I journeyed on however silently.

On the second morning following my night adventure with the bateláo among the rocks, we came to where the Negro opened into a large bay full five miles from its top to the south bank of the river. By noon we had worked around to the upper end, where I discovered a cove-like neck leading inland through an all but closed passage, so mysterious with its veil of bush and swinging vines and pendent black fibre swaying to the wind from the tree branches, that it piqued my curiosity, and I determined upon exploring its hidden road. Taking Yeggo, whom with his bothersome hat the patrón had delegated to the service of my inland wanderings because he was easiest spared from the crew, I headed into the little canal, which appeared to end in a wall of bramble. Nor did reality belie appearance, for here the stream narrowed and led into a tangle of bush so resistant, so tenacious, that at times we were put to actually cutting our way through. After a short space, however, we came out upon an igarapee clear of obstruction, but of no great width, although it sent off another stream of equal size at right angles, which, no doubt, finally emerged upon the Negro above where we had left it—a not uncommon habit. I have seen an igarapee divide itself three times between the

Digitized by Google

lagoon whence it started and the river into which it emptied apparently with no diminution of its volume in any branch. I have noted branches where no apparent connection existed between river and lagoon, or where was no lagoon at all! The ways of the Brazilian igarapee, like those of the caño, its Spanish counterpart, are devious, indeed, and passeth the understanding of the mere traveller along their sluggish course.

The igarapee upon which we emerged held an unchanging, howbeit a crooked, northerly direction, widening at times to as much as fifty feet, again narrowing so we could hardly have placed the canoe athwart the stream between its densely covered banks. When we had traversed a couple of miles, it opened into a tree-enclosed lagoon which in turn spread out so that we soon found ourselves travelling as if through inundated forest.

And now perforce we went slowly, for there was neither bank nor channel to guide us, through lanes of great-girthed monarchs. Here piercing the loop of hanging vines; there dodging the entangling meshes of some upstanding wide-spreading thorn-bearer; now listening to the subdued music of the batrachian host, anon gazing hungrily at some brilliant orchid perched temptingly out of reach just above us. Thus, slowly, quietly, we passed on and on, until we appeared to be in the very heart of an ancient and submerged wood. Then I moored the canoe at the side of a buttressed giant and sat feasting my eyes.

Until you attain to some familiarity with such a scene, the vista is one maze of trailing, looping, suspended things, with the actual tree trunks loom-

Digitized by Google

ing vaguely amid the festooning vines and the encumbering parasites. Even with a clearing vision you find it well nigh impossible to single out individuals at any distance through the curtain of myriad pendants which in places hang like one of those Japanese bamboo door screens, dropping from some high limb, and all the size or less of a lead pencil. On one tree I counted twenty-three such, hanging from forty to sixty feet without other attachment, straight to the ground. In other places, they were fewer in number and as much as three inches in diameter where they fell from the limb to fasten themselves to the ground very much after the manner of the famous banyan tree of India. Other trees again, sent from their lower limbs veritable multitudes of these pendants, which hung only part of the way to the ground and were so small as to look like great, coarse hair.

Yet the parasitic growths are even more bewildering, and one, which for want of a better name I will call the hanging garden, is beautiful beyond anything I ever saw in jungle anywhere. Varying from one to two, or even three feet in diameter, these cling midway of the straight tree trunk, sometimes on one side, sometimes embracing two sides, a collection of moss and mould and ferns, glorified by brilliant single-coloured flowers—occasionally by an orchid, which perhaps may have been at once their nucleus and inspiration. A crude description is this of one of nature's wildest and loveliest bouquets, which, fixed midair in the gloom of the forest, are like radiant gems nestling in dishevelled, dark hair, and must be seen to be appreciated.

Digitized by Google

Of single expressions of marvellous parasitic ornaments, the number is legion, but I shall mention only one or two, for it is a subject to which I can do scant justice, and I fear to bore with detail rather than to interest. One queer growth is about the size and appearance of a pineapple top; so nearly like it, you have difficulty at first in persuading yourself it has not been fixed to the tree by some jocular aviator. It grows usually in the crotch of the limb where the latter joins the trunk, yet often it is found on the middle of the limb, sometimes in pairs, suggesting potted plants. There were trees, indeed, which bore these parasites on all main top limbs, giving a queer and not unattractive effect.

An even stranger growth was a four by six inch roundish leaf at the end of a clean, long stem, which attached itself without favour or regularity here and there to the limbs, swaying in the air like a feather at the end of a pliant vine that had been hurled into place by some tropic Robin Hood. Another form somewhat on the same order bore a pond lily kind of leaf at the end of a shortish stem, which adhered to the tree with neither frequency nor order. Other trees, unhampered by such abnormal growths, bore in several instances the loveliest burden of yellow flowers stretching canopy-like over a part of their top. One marvelled at the vitality of trees which could sustain such a drain, and incidentally I observed that smooth-barked light-coloured trunks appeared to outnumber the darker, rougher ones.

On every side were the patent evidences of lavish nature. From the stump of a six-inch tree broken off near its top had sprung a three-foot shoot bearing

Digitized by Google

leaves. Once I picked up a nut with a one foot growing twig attached, which had sprung up out of it while it lay on the ground! Again I saw a blue-flower-bearing vine, which reaching from the ground had caught and entwined a pendant full fifty feet in the air—making of this column of blue blossoms against the deep green back-ground a very lovely spectacle.

Only in Malaya, have I seen such luxuriance—and not there anything to compare with the hanging gardens. On the other hand, the fern growth of the Malayan and Siamese jungle, gigantic in spread and reach and marvellous in design, has no equal in South America. Nor, in the South, is there the colouring of the Far East, or the ever recurring bamboo with its picturesquely disordered top,—or the leeches which beset the wilderness traveller at every step. I am referring to the interior not to the jungle edge, which always contains more life and is more colourful. The Malayan jungles appear less encompassed by vast stretches of primeval forest, which no doubt accounts for their advantage in colour. The dismal solitudes of the South American forests are avoided by both the sunlight which gives colour, and the life that makes exploration interesting rather than depressing.

We spent an entire morning paddling in this way overland through the forest, in which was entertainment in plenty to keep us a day or more had I not wished to push on and find a place where we might land. So for an hour or two farther we went along, working out to the edge of the submerged woodland, until we came again to the igarapee. After a bit this led us in turn to a lagoon apparently having no outlet

Digitized by Google

other than that through which we had come, until, on the far side close by a huge tree with three great buttress flanges standing out half a dozen feet at base, we found an opening into a stream about twenty feet wide. This carried us through a second piece of inundated forest before bringing us to another lagoon, where, because the surroundings appeared like *terra firma,* I decided to disembark for a more extended survey.

A great flapping of wings and a raising of bird voices, mostly displeasing, greeted our landing. Somehow I never could overcome my wonderment that in a land where there is so much to please the eye, there should be so little agreeable to the ear. It continues always strangely incongruous to me that these tropical birds, so brilliantly painted, should for such a majority have notes so unmusical. The rasping toucan, the screaming parrot tribe, the croaking herons, the bugling crane clan, the shrill complaints of the stilt-legged family—what an unlovely chorus they make! And since practically all the noises at the edge of the forest are made by birds, the ear grows aweary longing for the note of a mocker, catbird, bob-o-link, meadow-lark, wood-thrush or veery, those sweet singers of our own blessed land.

One bird voice I heard on this trip relieved the monotony even though it lacked melody. A dark bird, having the body of a big duck and legs like a heron, a long, supple, black neck, and a short beak, stalked the side of the swamp one evening, now and again plunging its bill into the pools which had settled at the base of small trees. Without other provocation for all I could see than the prompting of a wind-

Digitized by Google

filled body, it would at intervals inflate this long, black neck until it appeared to be on the verge of bursting—then opening its bill a little squeak came forth, so tremulous, so surprisingly weak, as to be absurdly inadequate. Considering the size of the bird and the labour of production, one had a right to expect at least a squawk. I never saw it but the once.

On one side of the lagoon appeared a kind of campo, but on the other sides were a swamp and palms, and behind stretched the dark forest. Skirting it we plunged into the swamp to reach the timber, carrying our camp outfit easily, for it was limited to dried fish, mandioca, a hammock and a cuia each. This is the usual equipment where such wilderness adventuring is attempted, for the way is devious and trap filled, and multitudinous thorned and noosed things reach forth to stay your progress, if, indeed, they do not throw you full length. There is other trek food more palatable, but none yielding equal substance for its bulk. You can easily carry enough dried fish to last you ten days, and the ways of serving it are many. As for mandioca—it is unrivalled for such travel. It tastes like a bran mash, to be sure, but it keeps you going, and its preparation is utterly simple. When hunger assails, you have merely to put a handful of the mandioca in your cuia, fill full of water, drain according to taste, or according to how much of drink you desire with your solid, and your meal is ready. Food and drink in one, in fact.

Before we had gone one hundred feet we fell into the enemies' hands. However free of such pests the black water of the Negro, the exemption is not

Digitized by Google

THE UBA USED ON MY INLAND TRIPS OFF THE RIO NEGRO

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

extended to the lagoons and swamps and igarapees of the back country. We got the real thing on this occasion; nearly as real as I afterwards found it on the upper Orinoco, but of greatly inferior quality to the breed of the Casiquiare River, where each and every individual insect holds out a welcoming proboscis. Though it took quite a long step ahead with this experience, my insect education was after all but in its swaddling clothes. My first line of defence was a big bandanna handkerchief fastened about my head and under my chin with the idea of protecting my neck, but when it successfully resisted being dragged off by the brush we worked through, it served as a protected harbour for the bug brigade that marched in at the open sides with colours flying and bands playing.

Having mastered my first lesson, I tied the bandanna around my neck, put my trousers inside my socks under canvas leggings, closely fastened my wristbands to head off too intimate exploration by the invaders, and yielded my face to the flying hosts. And they made the most of the opportunity, for I was fresh to this environment, and tender (comparatively). On the morning following, my neck and face were so swollen that I looked out through a pair of slits. Yeggo's face was normal, but his legs, bare to the knees, and his body, exposed through the many holes of his shirt, showed the wear and tear of the attack. The only joyful feature of our swamp trip was the final disappearance of that tantalizing hat of Yeggo's, which he wouldn't leave in the canoe as I had mine. Of course, it was impossible to keep it on his head as we squirmed through

Digitized by Google

the thick cover, using hands as well as feet, and after repeated failure he fastened it to his pack. In a piece of going where we floundered through over our knees in muck, a stout reed snatched the hat loose, springing erect to dangle it aloft in triumph as if it were the scalp lock of a vanquished foe. Yeggo was too much occupied ploughing passage to be aware of his loss. I saw it, however—and silently breathed a sigh of relief. Poor Yeggo mourned the hat for days and would not be comforted even though I gave him the wherewithal to equip himself with the most fantastic headgear the stock of the next trader he met could furnish.

On the other side of the swamp, we came to a small river flowing between forested banks in the direction of the Negro, although we had not passed it in our inland journey. Here we camped for a couple of days while I stalked the neighbourhood for new sights and Yeggo spent much of his time under a nearby palm, which bore in clusters a round, purplish berry the size of a big cherry, having a large stone covered with a pungent, pulpy flesh, that he seemed to relish, although they so puckered my mouth I decided them to be unripe. With its slender trunk and twenty feet of height the palm resembled what had been pointed out to me lower on the river as the assahy, the berries of which afford a native drink.

This first camp site was unhappily located in the course of an ant line of march, which made its appearance shortly after daylight, as we were preparing breakfast—forthwith postponed as we beat a hasty retreat, gathering our modest equipment for

Digitized by Google

rearrangement at a nearby spot outside the ant zone. I have read, in books of tourist manufacture, that you should permit the ants to continue their march across you—that they are "going somewhere," and "if unmolested will pass on." All of which reads well to the man in town—also as if the authors were lacking experience with certain South American species of the genus ant. By the time the busy and inquiring scouts have finished their foraging, you are unlikely to sit inert while the remainder of the army toils over you, especially when they are, as I have known them to be, several hours in passing. There are few insects, indeed, in the jungles, more troublesome to the adventurer than the ants, which are in numbers uncountable from the big sauba with its dome-shaped ground house, to those with houses in the trees, and other winged ones, apparently homeless and constantly on the move. Of all ants, however, the arch demon is a black monster an inch or more in length, which bites as hard as any wasp stings, and seems to deposit a poison, for the effects of its assaults stayed with me longer than those of any other insect in the country, and one of the most miserably uncomfortable quarter hours I ever had in the jungle was an encounter with a line of these ants, which fell upon me once as I slept on the Orinoco River.

Luck favoured me better in the new site we chose aside from the invader's line of advance. I had wished closer acquaintance with the rodents, of which there are many representatives, and an entire day of stealthy hunting nearby furnished me with several examples, including the paca. The smaller members of this large tribe have heads and bodies somewhat re-

Digitized by Google

sembling those of the weasel, and the larger are patterned after the woodchuck, including the largest, the capybara, which in the water looks like a big beaver. It is a stupid, semi-aquatic creature often seen in alluvial country, is easily killed and furnishes neither sport nor palatable meat. The agouti, according to my taste, is the only one worth eating, and frequents the dank places less than the others. I have seen it oftenest, in fact, on the campos near the forest, sitting up eating like a squirrel and looking like a clipped-eared rabbit.

Stopping at an isolated pool to examine a fuchsia-like flower which clung to a bush at the side, on my way back to camp after a day of exploration, my eye, always alert at such crocodile shelters, fell upon a lizard, full one foot and a half long, posed on the bank opposite. Instantly I " froze," returning the concentrated gaze with which I was regarded. At first sight of the reptile, memory jumped me to Arizona wanderings and the Gila monster, which it resembled near enough to be a foster brother, having, in fact, the same dark skin as the latter, and a similar decoration of light spots and lines. But for its tail, which was very long, a casual glance might easily mistake it for our one poisonous North American lizard.

Have you ever, in your woodland rambles, tested the duration and the steadfastness of the gaze of a creature which, either from fright attending upon surprise, or from curiosity unfraid, has stayed its flight to inspect you? How intent and how absolutely motionless it is! This lizard when discovered had its head raised at an acute and decidedly uneasy angle, yet there it remained without a quiver, with-

Digitized by Google

out a breath movement; it might have been fashioned from bronze for all the sign it gave. Probably at least five minutes elapsed (a heron and I once thus motionlessly stared at each other for ten minutes) before I slowly, as slowly as I could, began to draw my gun up from the ground where it rested butt down. I thought my action so slow as to be undetected, but with a flash of black the lizard had darted out of sight into the jungle before I could get even a hip shot. It was very likely a tegu.

The rapidity with which big lizards, even those so big as the apparently clumsy iguana, and large snakes, get out of view is another lesson the jungle holds for most of us. I shall always remember my one and only meeting with the bushmaster, that most dreaded of tropical America snakes. It was in a damp, open, wood growth, where I had been searching for jaguar tracks, that I came upon the snake, suddenly, unexpectedly. At the first swift glance I thought it, because of the marking, a six foot timber rattler. Realizing in the second flash of intelligence where I was, I knew that the reptile must be the repulsive thing which is accounted the largest and most dangerous of New World venomous snakes. And while I gathered myself to fire—it was gone. Had vanished as though only a foot long and no bigger than my finger. If it could go from me so quickly, how swift need the shooting be, I pondered (as I stood staring into the brush where it had disappeared) should it another time take the notion to come towards me?

Before I was out of my hammock next morning, Yeggo, trembling with obvious emotion, stood at my

Digitized by Google

head pointing a vibrant finger towards the water.

Stealing from tree to bush, from bush to tree, for about seventy yards, I discerned, on the bank in the early daylight, a full grown tapir cropping the lush grass by help of its prehensile lip, all unconscious of our nearby presence. 'Twas the best view I ever had of this seeming cross between the 'rhino and hog, an ungainly animal of the jungle with pig eyes set half way down to the mouth. It isn't ugly enough to be picturesque, like the wart hog or the 'rhino, or the spine armoured iguana of South America; it's just plain stupid looking. If there is any choice between them, the Brazilian is perhaps an improvement on the Malayan, because its head has more modelling, greater depth, and comes sharper off at the mouth, with a shorter, more snout-like nose. The Malayan is heavier, with longer prehensile lip and is lightish gray from shoulders to rump, otherwise it is a dirty black like the Brazilian. Both are extremely shy, haunting the rivers, in which they spend as much time as on land, and vigorous swimmers.

As I squatted watching the awkward beast, Yeggo disappeared, only to return shortly and proffer me the rifle which I had left, having no thought to kill so unsporting a creature. As I gave no indication of shooting after accepting the gun from his hands, my Indian factotum entered upon an energetic and appealing sign talk with such earnestness that a hand struck the brush—and away went the tapir. Yeggo was the most disgusted Indian I ever beheld. For a few hours the loss of the tapir overshadowed even the loss of his hat, and neither agouti nor a rail-like bird with which our larder was

Digitized by Google

supplied, kept him from sorrowing throughout our morning meal. The Indians hereabouts appear to greatly fancy the meat, and every tapir killed is signal for feasting, which, quite Indian-like, usually continues until the animal is devoured. Sometimes where luck favours the hunter so that more than one tapir is secured, the meat is smoked to cure it for keeping, but as a rule the flesh is roasted and eaten forthwith, for one tapir at a time is regarded as a find. When killed in the water it is said the tapir sinks like the 'hippo, to rise after an hour or two, but I can give no first hand information on the subject, those I killed both in Malaya and South America being on land at the moment of shooting.

Setting our faces toward the Negro, we spent that night near the swamp we had crossed two days before, and I killed a bat with a body within a shade of seven inches in length. Of small bats, there were, in fact, almost as many as of the ever chorusing frogs. Heavens, what throats those South American frogs must have! All night long the clamour continues without ceasing and without rivalry. No birds call at night, except occasionally a heron may croak dismally. Even fireflies, I was surprised to note, keep themselves under cover, though perhaps they await the dry season.

Regaining our canoe at the lagoon, I spent another couple of hours with the birds in a vain attempt in the drizzle and lowering clouds to get some photographs; but every exposure proved a blank. To be unable to utilize photographically such opportunities was disappointing to say the least, especially at this place, where the variety of birds

Digitized by Google

seemed unusual to me—wading, swimming, arboreal—all within calling distance of one another!

Going back to the river, we kept closely to the igarapee, moving swiftly along with the overhanging foliage reflected but vaguely under the leaden sky. At the submerged forest I yielded to the temptation to linger amid its strange beauty and manifold reptilian life. To hear a sudden plunk here, or an unexpected splash there, according to the size of the startled creature, or to detect a pair of bright eyes furtively sentineling you is not without its thrills in this shadowed loneliness.

Here we saw, too, the only snake of this trip, a richly coloured water boa of nine and a half feet, whose head I shattered with buckshot as it lay partly coiled on the low limb of a tree. Such waters are infested with these boas, which may grow to eighteen or twenty feet, it is said (a trader once showed me a skin twenty-seven feet long), but this was the only one recorded in my notebook on the Negro, or on the number of inland trips therefrom. In fact, the motive of this identical inland trip was to see the " big snakes," which everyone, including my bateláo men, told me I should encounter. Incidentally I may say, I have seen more snakes (rattlesnakes) in northwestern Texas or southeastern New Mexico during a single trip than ever I saw in all my tropical travels in South America and the Far East combined. Let me add that on land this boa is the constrictor, feeding mostly on the peccaries and the various rat tribe, and does not reach such length as its aquatic relative, the anaconda.

Winding our way through the forest, we again

Digitized by Google

emerged upon the igarapee, with its contractions and expansions, pushing along with only an occasional brief stop to inspect some strange plant or creature which may have caught my eye.

At one such time, when I had stopped to closely survey a six-inch tree twisted like a corkscrew, I saw that strange, aquatic, well named snake-bird (properly called anhinga) with its long, slim neck and serpentine-like head, which feeds upon fish caught under water.

Again, after we had passed the cleft-like waterway through the forest wall and had come near to the river, where, as I paddled round and round an unusually alluring orchid which invited to efforts of capture, I spied a dainty, reddish back jacana speeding lightly across the water, over the floating plants. And soon after I secured a young mata mata, that freak member of the turtle family, with its snake neck, ridged shell, and flat, broad head ending in elongated snout between tiny eyes. Seeing the head and neck alone, you'd never in a thousand years guess it belonged to a turtle. These turtles are rare and I congratulated myself on my find, a young one about eight inches long (they grow to three feet) and planned taking it to my friend Dr. Charles H. Townsend, for his most popular museum of all America, viz. the New York Aquarium. Sad to tell, I lost it subsequently on one of my numerous upsets in the uba.

In another hour we were again on the river, and in half a night and a long day's paddling caught up with the bateláo.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IV

HAULING UP THE RAPIDS

Since passing several conical hills a little to the west of Santa Isabel, the character of the land as far as eye could see had continued flat and unchanged, while along the river the trimmed hedge effect of forest presented an obscure and monotonous foreground. Approaching the Cababuri River, however, coming in on the left (north) bank, a vista of other conical hills looming in the south gave us cheer, for we knew they marked the beginning of the Rio Negro's long turn to the north near San Jose, and that of the three hundred miles to San Gabriel, more than two thirds had been left behind. Yet the hardest six hours of the journey lay before us in crossing the half mile mouth of Cababuri, augmented as it is by the swift water of the rapids, or "caxoeiras," as the Portuguese call them, just beyond. There were no rocks on which to fasten a hauling line and no way to get beyond, therefore, except by making a dash for it, which we did, the uba ahead with a towing line, and everyone on the bateláo, including Alleo and I, pulling to our limit on the sweeps. Even so, we were all of the morning in the passage.

Before we reached the San Jose rapids, in another day and a half, we had a further struggle through the narrows, a five-mile stretch where the river frees itself of islands to race swiftly and smoothly between banks not over one mile apart. Meantime, we encountered rain, which descended with such force that

Digitized by Google

it actually stung our backs, and lasted long enough to cool the air very perceptibly, my notebook recording 82°, the lowest of the voyage.

San Jose was the first sign post of the trip to bear definite tidings to me of our precise whereabouts. We had toiled through caxoeiras most of the days of the journey, but here I knew was practically the beginning of a stretch of sixty to seventy miles (including over forty miles of cataracts, sometimes called the Falls of the Rio Negro) of which the north end terminated my journey as supercargo on the bateláo.

According to the maps, apparently compiled by an absent treatment process, the great bend of the Rio Negro from west to north begins at the cataracts; in truth, it begins about twenty to twenty-five miles to the east at San Jose, where a small rounded hill on the right bank points to a short ridge as marking the start of the northward swing. Here the river expands suddenly so that it becomes a bay four or five miles wide, and upwards of seven long, with unruffled surface and greatly diminished current. A few miles inland, at the head of this bay on its west side, and facing down river, is seen another ridge-like elevation, with two peaks of seven hundred and fifteen hundred to two thousand feet, respectively, each crowning an end. A little to the south stands a dome-shaped rock and tree-covered mount, solitary and sheer, to about the same height. These constitute the Sierras Curicuriari, rising as do the ones near Santa Isabel and elsewhere, abruptly out of the level plains. Apparently they are covered with vegetation in part at least, and quite disconnected with any range—a geological characteristic along this river.

Digitized by Google

Wallace, I note, estimates the higher two of these peaks—the isolated one and that on the east end of the ridge—as being three thousand feet. This appears rather too high to me, although my calculation was merely one of comparison with the rock peak at Cocui, on the Brazilian frontier, which is known to be about one thousand feet. As between the estimates of that distinguished scientist and mine, there can be no hesitation by the reader; I merely cite what I find recorded on the ground in my notebook. Abrupt rock peaks rising out of the dead level country, loom large to the voyager who has been passing through the flat land of the Road, and perhaps I estimated too low in fear of being betrayed by the sudden (and welcome) contrast into making figures too high. Still, with all due respect, I should like to see that dome measured.

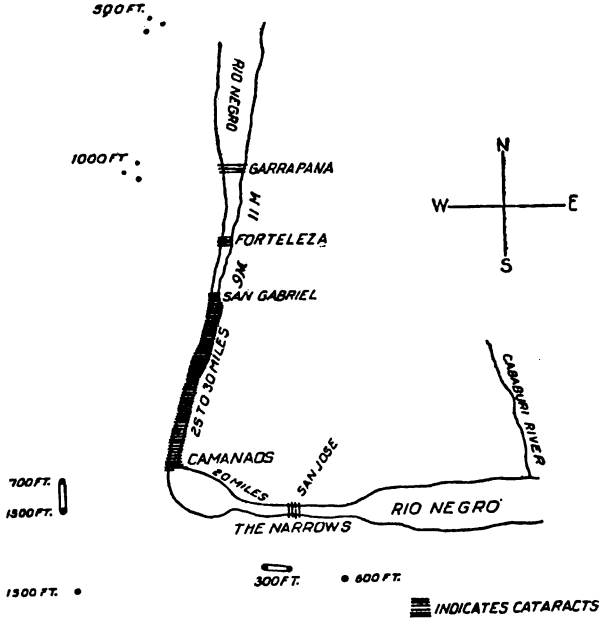
Some of our universities ought to send a scientific expedition up the Negro and to Duida on the Orinoco; there is plenty to give to the world in the way of exploration and of authoritative description.

Sweeping the base of these solemn sentinels as it turns, the river is headed due north by the time it reaches Camanaos, twenty to twenty-five miles beyond San Jose and the real beginning of the bad rapids. Picture to yourself a mill-race, sometimes more, sometimes less than a mile in width, and fifty miles long, sprinkled with upstanding boulders, crossed by ledges of rock, and divided by occasional islands, with cataracts and whirlpools and patches of comparatively unbroken, though always racing water. That is the Rio Negro from Camanaos to Garrapana, where another group of three conical

Digitized by Google

peaks on the west bank marks the final effort of this long series of cataracts before the river calms and broadens to a width of three miles.

Standing on the ruins of the old Spanish fort on the bluff above Forteleza, a bird's-eye view, beginning at the north of this seventy miles of the Negro from



AUTHOR'S APPROXIMATE SKETCH MAP OF THE SO-CALLED FALLS OF THE RIO NEGRO

San Jose to Camanaos, 18 to 20 miles, required 3 days; Camanaos to San Gabriel, 25 to 30 miles, required 5 days; San Gabriel to Forteleza, 9 miles, required 2 days; Forteleza to Garrapana, 11 miles, required 2 days; 65 to 70 miles and 12 days of almost continuous hauling. Bad rapids begin at Camanaos. A small island at San Gabriel divides the Negro into two racing, seething channels.

Garrapana to San Jose, reveals a sudden narrowing of the river from three miles to one mile at Garrapana, followed by an immediate expansion, which continues until Forteleza. Here again it shrinks to begin forty miles of cataracts to Camanaos, where starts the big bend to the east which ends at San Jose. At the north and south ends of this flight of cataracts, a

Digitized by Google

group of three conical peaks rise from the otherwise unbroken land surface; and beyond these again another small group—all on the right bank—outposts, so to say, to the flanking sentinels of this land strait, which closely resembles that other famous land strait in Venezuela between Maipures and Atures. Though emphasized at San Gabriel and at Maipures, such outcroppings are a geological characteristic of this division of the flowing road from Santa Isabel on the Negro to Atures on the Orinoco, where they end. Dr. Hamilton Rice discovered similar rock outcroppings on the upper waters of the Uaupes, during his thorough and distinctly notable exploration of that river.

The day following our soaking at the Cababuri was a scorcher and as we stuck midstream on a rock all the afternoon, the mishap afforded excellent and welcome opportunity to sun our outfit in the 98° temperature. Another day and night of toilsome progress brought us on the twenty-fifth of our journey to San Jose, of which the only recollections lingering with me are a big yellow butterfly that came aboard, with blue moons at the centre edge of its wings, and a hang-nest oriole (japim) plaintively calling so much like a lost chick as to entirely deceive me. Three days more brought us to Camanaos, with its three palm-adobe houses and as many families, whom we had planned to have help us around the rapids but whose interest in our belongings appeared so absorbing we scarce could get their attention long enough to even make a proposal of work. We sought to buy fresh fish but they had none; with a river full of fish they were eating mandioca and dried fish and no bet-

Digitized by Google

ter off in supplies than we. In fact, they were not so well off, as I found to my dismay after they had discovered my canister of sugar; and I simply had to stand guard over my demijohn of cachaca, though here I was aided by my Indians, whose interest in protecting this and the tobacco with which I rewarded their greater efforts, was not unselfish. They well knew that the fewer demands on these stores the more would be coming to them; and the cachaca was getting low.

Ordinarily I disbelieve in stimulants on a journey of sustained, tiring effort, but along this division of the Road in the rainy season, the continuous soaking to which the men were subjected, eating in the rain, sleeping in the rain and directly on the water where a morning miasma hung so thick you could not see fifty feet, not to mention the depression following upon days of wearisome struggle in sodden surroundings, under an ever recurring downpour—all this, I say, persuaded me to employ a small amount of the native rum as a preventive against fever and a counter-irritant to mental and physical conditions generally. I merely regard its moderate use as medicinal and protective.

Every people of the wilderness or the near wilderness have their fermented drinks, rather raw stuff, which in South America may be brewed from bananas, palm-nuts, pineapples, even from mandioca. Of such class is cachaca. Whether it is efficacious as a fever safeguard I cannot declare. I can only say my crews made better time and seemed in better condition than other canoes of Indians we met; but there is no doubt whatever of its inspirative

Digitized by Google

service and of its use as a persuader to endeavour. Many a time we should have stuck or lost hours but for the hope of that small horn of rum promised at the close of a hard, long day. And when cachaca failed of its persuasive powers, there remained tobacco—better than money—and in barter coveted beyond all else except sugar, which is so scarce as to be a luxury eagerly sought and seldom secured.

It is reckoned twenty-five to thirty miles from Camanaos to San Gabriel, and we were five days covering the distance, from three in the morning until long after night. Most of the hours of those days it rained, and on two nights thunder and lightning visited us with vivid flashes and thunderous crashes which boomed and reverberated and roared and cracked until my ears rang. You must experience a tropical storm at its full to realize what an uproar thunder can make when it is real earnest.

At Camanaos and all the other major rapids throughout this much broken course, everything had to be taken out of the bateláo and packed along shore on our backs, while the boat was dragged up and through the cataracts and over and around the rocks, until the worst was passed. Then we loaded up, hauled another short piece, encountered more cataracts, partly unloaded, again dragged the bateláo across the rock dikes, and once more went on our way, to shortly repeat the laborious performance. Such was the manner of our progress during those five days. Perhaps for brief spaces in some clear, little bay we could work along the bank with the poles; for still shorter distances, maybe a stretch of back water or " remanse " enabled us to use the oars; but quickly there would come again the swift water, the projecting

Digitized by Google

HAULING THE BATELAO OVER THE ROCK AT THE EDGE OF CAMANAOS RAPIDS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

boulders and the cataracts with another period of heavy surging on the rope by all hands.

Sometimes we came to a series of great, bare rock islands divided by narrow streams of boiling water, and impossible of passage because of the menacing, jagged tops. Here hauling on the cable fastened ahead by the uba crew, we worked our slow way from rock island to rock island until we passed outside the last obstruction, sometimes considerably beyond midstream; then by the same process we worked along the up-river side of the barriers back to the north bank again. It was excessively arduous, slow and hazardous progression, for as we worked out the rapid water swung us around, often tearing us loose from our grip and hurling us back against the rocks. At such times every device of locomotion was employed. One-half the crew hauled on the cable, part of the other half used the poles with the numerous rocks for purchase, and, where the water shoaled, the rest jumped out to push and heave.

Frequently we advanced by hauling along the rocks under the bank. Sometimes the men tracked the bateláo through the swirling water, scrambling from rock to rock, but most often we moved onward hauling from one boulder to another by the cable. Stretched on the deck, every man of us with feet braced against the gunwale, we pulled at a given signal—pulled—pulled—the rope being securely fastened as it came in literally inch by inch. That was the process. At times we hung straining for minutes, our advance scarcely perceptible to the eye; and at times, indeed, we lost ground by the slipping of the rope. Round some of the difficult rapids we tracked with a line at bow and stern.

Digitized by Google

Too frequently the bateláo got away from us. On the second day the piassava three-inch cable broke and the boat set off on a mad career, soon checked, however, by jamming among the rocks and seething water with a smashed tiller. Often, while being carried ahead, the submerged cable became entangled on the bottom among the rocks, and on such occasions it was most interesting to watch the diving and under water work of the Indians while they attempted to free it. All these Rio Negro Indians appear to be equally at home in the water as on land, but one of my crew, with a negro cast of countenance, was well nigh amphibious. He would remain under for two minutes at a stretch, working to loose the cable and long after the others had come to the surface for air.

From the half information I gained through a limited communication with my men, I had fancied San Gabriel the end of our troubles, but when we finally arrived, I found them only a little more than half over, as we still had another three days getting the bateláo over the major cataracts Cocui and the Forteleza at the other end of the neck of land upon which San Gabriel is situated; three days of almost unbroken rope-hauling, with intervals of heavy rains and a blistering sun that sent the mercury up to 100° in the shade. Even with the cargo out, it took all day to get the bateláo around Cocui. But what a feast those Indians had when the boat at last rested beyond the Forteleza, after the twelve days' toil from San Jose! And as the disembarked cargo lay upon the rocks, the rain gave that dried pirarucu another sousing, to add to its already well developed odour!

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER V

ANCIENT SAN GABRIEL AND ITS FOREST DESERT

The children of a cheerful fancy are the inspiration of a long trail; often too they lead to a disillusion which appears tragic enough at the moment of unveiling, but actually adds an enlivening element to adventuring in the great, silent places. Until you cross the frontier to pass beyond the area of supporting columns and cached supplies, your progress towards the border land is very apt to be a series of scrambles from post to post of outfit. You leave one to struggle on to the next, which forthwith becomes a goal of plenty and of ease to beckon weary muscles and soothe rebellious stomachs. You may know full well that the creature comforts in the offing comprise nothing more luxurious than a crudely constructed bedstead or an armchair of clumsy, homemake perhaps, yet day by day as you cut down the intervening distance, the true traveller sense of you optimistically pictures those homely furnishings till they become things of artistic modelling and voluptuous ease; while the anticipated dish of baked beans stands unrivalled this side of Boston. Viewed from the lower end of a swift running river the least settlement above transforms to metropolitan completeness; the lowliest interior into all the comforts of home.

Ah those rose-tinted visional camps of to-morrow, how they lighten the journey!

From my first day aboard the crawling bateláo,

Digitized by Google

always San Gabriel had loomed splendid and inviting upon the mental horizon as a harbour where rest and bounty awaited us after a month's up-river toil. In reality we found it a port of destitution, unequalled for sheer physical beauty elsewhere on the Rio Negro, but with scarce enough in the larder to sustain life among its handful of hopeless denizens. Except from Corcovado, the three thousand foot mountain guard of Rio Janeiro, I have had few more entrancing views, indeed, than from atop the ruined walls of the old fort here, now crumbling beyond repair on a knoll which for miles commands the river both ways. To the west, the rapids whirl and roar directly below you; on your right and left at the north and south ends, respectively, of the maddened water, rise those isolated conical peaks to which I have made repeated reference; beyond and on every side, extending as far as eye can reach, runs the dark line of the forest, unbroken, unrelieved,—appalling in its immensity and gloom.

Should San Gabriel, in progressive ages to come, ever develop into a city, the great foundation blocks of that relic of a long forgotten life, which was both enterprising and sanguinary, will be displaced for the cornerstone of a world famous hotel.

One hundred and fifty years ago, San Gabriel (founded in 1753) was filled with consequence and bustle as became the most important rally and trade station on Portugal's New World frontier; to-day, it has only the tradition of its past and twelve more or less ramshackle houses, of which but three were occupied at the time of my sojourn. On the ground next highest to that covered by the decaying fort,

Digitized by Google

THE MOUNTAIN SENTINELS ON THE BIG BAY

MY PERSONAL CAMP ALONGSIDE THE RAPIDS AT SAN GABRIEL

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

stands the church. Its walls for the greater part are bare of mortar covering; the once ornate mural decoration is almost obliterated, and outside on a nearby scaffold, four bells of varied size show years of neglect in their grime. A path over great, flat, sunken boulders bearing rough hewn steps, leads to the houses far below; and alongside, tottering posts tilting a carved iron lantern arm, indicate where once were artistic sense and a lighted way.

But its light has quite gone out now, and with it, alas, seem also to have departed, ambition,—even common industry from the desolate stragglers! When hunger presses they catch fish; the remainder of their time is passed in the hammock, where they sway and smoke and gossip. Nor is this propensity peculiar to San Gabriel; in truth, it is fairly representative of native disposition on most of the Rio Negro.

The posts which thrived in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries when the Portuguese and Spaniards traded actively, have all but passed away along the flowing road in Brazil and Venezuela. The Indians have receded farther and farther from the highway, and in their place we find the mixture of Portuguese and Indian, Portuguese and Negro, Indian and Negro—a mongrel, who is active neither to the advantage of his fellows nor the development of the country. He raises practically nothing; not even mandioca, his staff of life, except here and there; scarcely any fruit, and strangest of all, only an occasional cocoanut, that manna of tropical lands which here would of course flourish widely. Even the country tobacco, of which all smoke much in cigarette

Digitized by Google

form—rolled in the inner bark of a kind of birch tree —is grown sparsely. Wherever industrial conscience awakens, rubber is the incentive; for the rest, life is literally a from hand to mouth existence endured without shame and closed prematurely.

All over the world to kick another man's dog is to invite a fight with its owner. Not so with the Rio Negro degenerate—he merely laughs; you may kick his dog as much as you please if you are that odious kind of human brute.

My heart sank as the impoverishment of San Gabriel and the nature of its derelict householders unfolded before me; for the chances of securing an uba and a crew for the pursuit of my journey were anything but encouraging. As soon as it became known the stranger had cachaca the male contents of the three houses so promptly gathered about where I camped in the open on the rocks, I was led to think for a moment that perhaps, after all, my task would not be so difficult. But I was soon undeceived; their interest lay in the rum, as they evinced speedily.

Now the truth is that I had had trouble all along to save my cachaca from the Indians; not that I begrudged them the small cheer they might derive from it, but simply because my supply was limited, while the journey was long, and I wanted its stimulating influence distributed throughout the route rather than used up as a joy-maker for one section. Hitherto, my difficulties had been confined largely to my own crew; here with all my belongings brought from the bateláo and perching in full view on the rocks, I had to withstand local importunities as well as those of my erstwhile boatmen now grown almost insolent in

Digitized by Google

their demands. It really became quite a serious little situation for a period; and as well for the continuance of my leadership as for the advance of my expedition a showdown was necessary and made that there might be no doubt of my determination to protect my provisions and dispense my favours as I choose.

Nothing is so fatal to success in wilderness adventuring as loss of mastership. The traveller who permits himself to be "bamboozled" or his outfit rifled, loses hold upon his men and lays the foundation for future trouble of a continuous and increasing character. Whether he be hunting or exploring or border-land travelling, the lone white man must maintain unquestioning native belief in his authority—and fairness; for the latter attribute is equally essential. It means there will be occasions when he must act promptly, sometimes severely—though never cruelly, of course. He must punish theft without delay; he must checkmate underhand manœuvres; he must tolerate no familiarity that suggests equality. He must, in a word, be the boss, a just boss whose reward is as swift as his punishment. And unless he is so qualified, the adventurer will be wise to turn round and beat a safe retreat while he may. Once control is lost, riot results and a solitary man in such a plight in the wilderness has about as much chance as a snowball in that place of traditional heat and untimely repentance.

Having decided I was not to be "bulldozed" my visitors sulked in groups around me, but after a time I warmed them up a bit with a little sugar, and when eventually a more friendly atmosphere had been established, sought to interest them in my trip.

Digitized by Google

No volunteers were forthcoming, however, until I announced that a small horn of cachaca every night, as long as it lasted, went with the job, in addition to a reward of tobacco at the end of the journey for those that merited it. On this basis eight men offered their services, but none of them had a canoe, nor would any of the others trade me an uba for the liberal portions of rice or pirarucu I was willing to give.

With the labour field at hand exhausted, the necessity of extending my search became manifest, and incidentally developed a rather perplexing situation. I could not of course leave my belongings unguarded while I went looking for a canoe, as thus to forsake them, meant not to find them on my return; and squatting over my stuff on the rock was not likely to get me very far on my journey. So I made the outfit into packs and sallied forth on my mission laden like unto an itinerant street peddler of Rio. On my back were the remaining rice and dried fish; over one shoulder balanced the sugar and coffee canisters and the cachaca demijohn, while from the other hung camera and the two water-proof canvas bags in which I carried tobacco and note-books; in hand, of course, was my rifle. I must have made an amusing figure of a peripatetic recruiting sergeant, as it were. At any rate I found what I sought under an open shed-like rain shelter, in shape of a forlorn round faced little man, who said he knew where, up-river, he could get me an uba, but it would take three to five days to fetch it, meanwhile, I could make the inland excursion I planned. And so it was arranged.

Digitized by Google

WE RECEIVE CONGRATULATIONS AFTER HAVING GOT THE BATELAO ACROSS THE LAST RAPIDS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Unless you had seen the demonstration however, you would not believe that one's departure after so brief an acquaintance could arouse such deep emotion as surged under that crude shelter in the next hour while I endeavoured to engage two other men for my inland trip—extra men being necessary to carry the demijohn and other unneeded things which I felt I could not leave in safety at San Gabriel. The fervid assurances, reiterated and indorsed over and again by the assembled company, of the safe-guarding of my effects, including the cachaca, during my absence, would have moved a wooden Buddha to compliance. I'm ashamed to have been so obdurate, but being a firm disciple of the ounce of prevention doctrine, I finally secured two boys to go along. Incidentally I had to keep an eye on the demijohn boy all the days we spent in the forest; his popularity with the others of the party was instant and alarming. After all, I'm not so sure that the bother attendant upon carrying cachaca does not very nearly counter-balance the magic of its presence in opening ways and providing means of travel! However, we at last got started for the forest, each of us carrying a pack swung on forehead or shoulder bands, the Indians making their harness of vines and tough, pliable inner bark.

How awesome is the deep equatorial forest in its immensity, and how disappointing! It is not at all the picture of your untutored imagination—brilliant in flaming foliage and gay with the chatter of wild life. On the contrary, it is sombre and forbidding and silent. Here is no frog chorus, or hum of insect, or hoarse croaking bird; even the harassing voice

Digitized by Google

of the parrot is stilled. 'Tis a vast desert where you may not venture without compass, for neither landmarks nor the stars attend you; there is only the canopy of the trees above and the tangle of undergrowth below and around. Where indeed is there a desert to equal the forest desert! But the trees are wonderfully impressive with their huge, smooth trunks from four to six feet in diameter, limbless for forty to sixty feet. Some are supported by buttresses which stand out at their base three or four feet, like great flanges, and all share their burden of the marvellous parasitic life which may express itself in flower-like decorations, or in festooning, entwining, pendent vines, innumerable in quantity, and of every character and many dimensions.

Of course there is life in the deep forest, plenty of it, but it is sly and noiseless, in keeping with the huge solitude it calls home. You find here the many varieties of rodent family; the sly tapir; the clumsy appearing but surprisingly active ant-eater; a wild dog—a greyish coyote-like animal with a dog tail—of which I shot one; several of the cats, though they (including jaguar—head of the family) keep closer to the jungle edges or near the breaks in the forest where birds and streams and peccaries are more frequent and the hunting is better and the quarry an improvement on the rodents.

At such an opening where we camped one night after five days in the forest, I heard a curious drumming or booming, not at all unlike that made by the grouse, only of much less volume, and Gregorio, my best man, whom I signalled inquiringly, stalked it with me. From behind a bush I had a plain view of a

Digitized by Google

dark bird about the size of a pheasant, standing some fifty feet away, booming without opening its bill or moving its wings. On its neck appeared loose skin, which might have played a part in the booming, though I could not see any inflation as the bird strutted in life. We found it good eating. Gregorio, by the way, took more interest in the wild life and had more knowledge of it than any of the Indians I met on the river. Another of the travellers' surprises being the small knowledge these people appear to have of the life to which they live so near. He was a queer chap, Gregorio, but cheerful, and often indulged in song. One night at a camp we made at base of a beautiful stem-fluted fern, he broke out in one which for intoning and rhythm sounded oriental. Out of sight you would have sworn a Japanese had suddenly turned up in the woods and was rejoicing thereat.

We had some dry hours, but not many, for the reputation of San Gabriel as being the rainiest section on the Negro was fully sustained. In these hours of relief most of our bird killing was done, and among others brought down, was one brown about the size of a grouse, with red on its head, and tiny white spots on its wings. In temper it resembled our northern " fool hen " grouse, usually making a short, low flight to roost in full view. None of the handsome, metallic trogans common to this neighbourhood crossed our path, and only one recluse toucan did we spy, which was not surprising. Indeed, we considered ourselves very lucky in seeing as many. The often published, full catalogues of beasts and birds which the casual traveller seems to have seen simply in passing along, usually in launch or canoe, are

Digitized by Google

always a source of envious wonderment to me. I have had no such good fortune, and yet have counted myself rather lucky in seeing so much of wild life. One must be lucky indeed, or the wild life teeming to see many of the varieties merely in passing. My less spectacular and evidently less profitable method has been to sit quietly waiting, hour after hour, for what chanced to come, moving from section to section in my observation.

Returning to the river we had a small adventure with a herd of peccaries, which have more courage to the square inch than all the cat family combined; and Gregorio was well scratched getting one of the smaller of the ant-eaters * out of a tree to which it clung by its sharp curving claws. In fact, our menu on this trip was varied and excellent, for in addition to the birds, not to mention pigs and rats, we came across several berry bearing palms, one particularly good-looking specimen carrying an apricot-like yellowish fruit in great bunches, which Gregorio said tasted like banana, but which we did not stop to gather, being on the last leg of our return—rain soaked and leg weary.

---

* Not including tail, this ant-eater is approximately one and a half to two feet in length—which is about half that of the great ant-eater. It is also yellowish with black lateral band, and arboreal, whereas the large species is greyish and black, and frequents swampy ground.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VI

BY UBA TO THE FRONTIER

My round face little man proved to be as good as his word, and the promised uba lay high on the bank two days before our return on April 16. The question of crew remained unanswered, however. When I left for the forest, seven men, including a patrón, had agreed to accompany me, but when after another day or so of dilly-dallying I decided to start, two were all I could muster in addition to Gregorio, which gave us a total of four paddles, including mine —rather few for the strength of current and the length of canoe we had to drive against it.

Though we left at Forteleza the last of the bad rapids, yet for several days we encountered cataracts formidable enough to necessitate emptying the canoe in passage. Nor was it the rough water which gave the greatest tussle, but the smooth, strong flow above just before it broke upon the rocks. Always the water was swift. Every bend, every clump of projecting trees, every up-standing or jutting rock, of which there were many, set up its whirlpool to increase our task in a river that already was speeding at the rate of seven miles the hour. At places we'd haul the uba unsteadily among a sea of rocks; again drag it bodily over ledges of bare granite; at night it would pound against the smooth boulder we invariably chose for rest, if we were so fortunate as to find one, because of the comparative immunity afforded from insects.

From the Garrapana rapids (the uppermost of

Digitized by Google

the long series which ends at Camanaos) throughout the thirteen days it took us to cover the about four hundred miles to Pimichin at the southern gateway to fabled El Dorado, with changes of fresh men at the two trading posts (San Marcellinos and San Carlos), we travelled hard from before daylight to long after dark, at times until midnight. This was partly during the moon's last quarter and the scene at three in the morning when we started was one of weird beauty which always fascinated me; the soft half-light with its shifting outlines, the nodding limbs in the current, the dark bays with their lurking shadows, the looming points with their fantastic images, the swaying canoe as we put on steam to round a bend of swift water. I fear I did not do my share with the paddle under the magic influence of the "madrugar," as the Indians call this hour. The first streaks of dawn came about five, and in half an hour the sun was up, if it was coming at all that day. Often, however, a heavy mist hung over the trees, hiding everything from view beyond a hundred yards, and then the day opened slowly, silently, seemingly sullen and ashamed. Its close was no less unlovely. As the very short dusk set in the bats took up their faltering flight, the clanging frog chorus tuned up, and a blue haze like the sluggard smoke of a campfire, settled below the tree tops.

Few birds showed along this division of the road, although wherever the forest opened, especially behind the boulder camps, they announced themselves noisily, as if to prove that opportunity, rather than

Digitized by Google

life was lacking. None-the-less my note-book records always a scarcity of birds at or near rapids.

Except at the mouth of the Uaupes or Caiary, as it is variously called—which Alfred Wallace first ascended in 1851 and Dr. Hamilton Rice descended from its source in 1909, thus adding much to our knowledge of this strange region—we tarried little by the wayside even for food, making no pretence to have more than one cooked meal during the twenty-four hours and that at noon. At night, when we tied up it would be to a boulder where wood was lacking, or, if there happened to be wood, also there was rain. In the morning we made no fire for the same reason. The "noon" meal was eaten any hour between ten in the morning and three in the afternoon, according to how the rain came, or more correctly speaking, according to when it stopped and where we found ourselves. The distance we made was a long way short the ratio of work, but after the crawling bateláo, the uba was a Twentieth Century Limited.

Following the bends added tremendously to the distance we travelled, but eased the paddling, which was hard in the extreme. Gregorio spoke truly when he tried to comfort me in my disappointment at Forteleza, by saying the crew was capable, even though small. They kept steadily at the exacting work without a murmur, unless I except Miguel, the patrón, who was constantly mumbling, and relieving himself now and again of yawns so prodigious it seemed they must rack his system to its keelson. You'd think he was about to yield the ghost, but it was only his day habit, which by night took form of loud and repeated groaning as he slept soundly. He

Digitized by Google

was willing enough, but not a good steersman, and several times got us into trouble, from which he should have kept clear.

The pride of the canoe was Ato, a Venezuelan Indian of negro blood, who towered over the other members of the crew, although he probably did not exceed five feet ten inches in height. His eyes were closely set, his teeth file pointed, he had a pronounced negro nose and the white-spot scars of the country skin disease covered his hands, feet and legs. The chief article of his costume was a sleeveless tunic, held at the waist by a very fanciful bead and leather belt; but his pride was a much bedecorated brown plush sombrero, for which he said he had given a month's hard work. He was no Adonis, but had a powerful stroke and set a good pace.

There is none of the poetic, silent stealth of novelists and tradition in the South American Indian's up-stream paddling. The ordinary stroke, to which a pronounced beat is given by striking the gunwale with the paddle handle just before taking water with the blade, is about thirty to the minute, though I have counted eighty and over in brief spurts to get beyond swirling cataract water. The most serviceable stroke on a long stretch is really two strokes, a short easy one, followed by a hard longer one, the first keeping way on the canoe. This stroke the crew will maintain at about thirty to the minute, increasing or decreasing at command of the bowman, who raises his paddle as a preliminary to speeding, and at the end of the spurt throws the water high in the air from his blade as signal to slow down. During the hitting up, the uba rocks

Digitized by Google

like a row boat in a cross sea, and the water on the keel sloshes over everything within reach. Oftentimes after such a spurt all the crew take up the bowman's signal in a playful spirit of rivalry as to who can throw the most water highest. This is great fun for the men, but it soaks every uncovered thing in the forward end of the toldo. Usually a period of loafing follows a burst of this kind, during which half of the men eat and banter the others who keep the uba headed up. It always amused me mildly to see Ato set Miguel's ration of mandioca afloat in a cuia which the current carried back to the expectant patrón at the stern. Once an eddy deflecting its course, Miguel went overboard after it, partly wrecking the toldo and very nearly upsetting the canoe among some rocks, where it rammed and jammed until it seemed as if it must be split from stem to stern.

No craft but a very heavy dugout like the uba could endure such usage, and ours being typical of the river, is entitled to description. It was thirty feet long on a two foot and a half beam at its widest, with both ends tapering slowly. The floor grating is made of inch wide lengths of split bamboo laid about an inch apart lengthwise on cross pieces six inches or so above the keel, which always carries about three inches of water, bailed out periodically when it exceeds that depth. At the floor the uba was two feet wide with six inches from floor to gunwale inside, and two or three inches outside freeboard according to loading—all of which conveys an idea of how ill-equipped we were for rough going.

The toldo is a barrel-shaped house made by lashing, over hoops of cane, a kind of native matting

Digitized by Google

which when new sheds rain that does not continue too long. They are set up in the stern end and vary in size. Mine was eight feet long, about two feet and a half high from the canoe floor at the entrance, and a foot lower at the back. Of this I occupied about four feet, the remainder being taken up by the mandioca and other supplies, directly in front of which my personal outfit was arranged as much as possible to provide something for me to lie back against. It is impossible to sit upright, even in the front end, so mostly you must recline with drawn knees. When you can no longer endure several varieties of this cramped position you stretch forth your bare feet into the burning sun or the rain, as the case may be.

Even as I write, so long after, I am amused at recollection of the inside of my toldo, and perhaps it may interest you. Needless to say, in such quarters, what one uses daily should be at hand; and there must be no butter fingers, for anything like a pencil, match-box, pipe, knife, slipping from your grasp goes into the water on the keel, which in addition to penalizing careless fingers, is a harbor for insects. Articles must be stowed intelligently and in the smallest possible compass, for you can not be moving round much in a cranky boat having less than three inches of freeboard. Of course you are barefooted, as you have frequently to go overboard and help the canoe among the rocks; also because you cannot move about in the uba with shoes. You need all the care and ease of motion you can command; no sudden movements over that crank keel. Inside the toldo you navigate on hands and knees; outside it is the work of

Digitized by Google

THE NATIVE DUGOUT CANOES OF THE RIO NEGRO

THE UBA IN WHICH I JOURNEYED

THE ANCIENT PORT OF SAN GABRIEL

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

a gymnast. To those who have grown prideful of toilet making triumphs in the sleeping-car upper berth, I recommend, as an entertaining experience, dressing inside a toldo of this size.

Whatever you require must be within reach. Midway up the toldo, inside under the hoops supporting the matting, was the favourite repository of the men for their tobacco, and bark cigarette papers. And here also I kept my towel, shoes and socks (which I wore only when we stopped as protection against the insects) and soap and comb, each on a string. Field glasses and gun were lashed along the top; at my left were belt, with knife and revolver, watch, thermometer, aneroid—all tied to the toldo ribs. At my right, on the floor was the camera case, a small gripsack and the water-proof canvas bag containing films and note-books, which I kept always where I could grab them to safety without delay when the canoe careened. At the left on the floor were my Preston kit, comprising canteen, fry pan, cup, fork, spoon and tooth brush, and a cuia in which I kept pipe, tobacco in immediate use, and matches. All these hanging things were fastened so as not to swing before my eyes, otherwise when the canoe rocked I should have had the D. T's. Directly back of my head were other water-proof canvas bags containing emergency medicines, reserve tobacco and matches; and near the centre, overhead, were the invaluable filter and the collapsible canvas bucket.

What a junk shop it appeared! Lying on my back surveying this motley array, only the three balls seemed missing to complete the picture. I used

Digitized by Google

a single blanket folded lengthwise between waterproof canvas, all rolled up during the day, both for cleanliness and convenience. When it rained I pulled up the canvas, spread a poncho over the camera at the side and baggage behind, and sat like a brooding hen trying to keep things dry. It was a constant and ineffectual struggle. Most of the storms drove downriver and protection against the rain was next to impossible; we were literally soaked for by far the greater portion of the time.

Among the diversions afforded by the toldo was the catching of large spiders, which appeared to flourish despite my daily assault. I wondered where they came from in such abundance, and concluded they must be swept aboard from the over-hanging trees of the banks; yet I never actually saw the invasion, as very well I might, since the biggest I killed covered a space about the size of my palm, and was by no means shy, indeed, he undertook to dispute possession of the toldo with me.

'Twas not a joyful place, that toldo, with its heat and smells, and I used it only at night, and not then, if the men were sleeping ashore.

There were many islands in this stretch of the river, though of smaller area than those seen below San Gabriel, and once in a while we passed an open place on the bank that made an agreeable break in the otherwise unchanging dark sky line. On one memorable day, too, we came to a collection of four Indian shacks, which seemed as an oasis in a forest desert, but proved so in appearance only, for the Indians had nothing in the food line to trade, having come to the river to fish. Throughout this

Digitized by Google

section the scattered Indians live in small companies and almost invariably on or very close to the rivers, because these latter offer opportunities for occasional employment, and yield them fish, turtles, and water-fowl. The great woodland wildernesses are not food producers, and there is almost no overland travel; the Indians following the windings of the rivers in their process of establishing temporary or permanent settlement, as well as in search for food.

In this particular part of the river we found other attractions also, frequently coming to a "remanse" as it is called—a helpful phenomenon which reverses the current for a short distance close in to the bank. I have seen some queer remanse freaks. Once I remember a double-barrelled example: *i.e.*—a remanse flowing up-stream on both sides the main current which was readily distinguished by quantities of white spume on its surface. Invariably, when we encountered such a life-saving station, the Indians stopped paddling and fell to eating, and though my anxiety to get forward made any delay harassing to a distressful degree, I never interfered with their habit. You must not expect to make over the people you encounter in the borderland. They have their established manner of doing things and you must have the patience to fall in with it, and the spirit and experience to seek out the best of things as they happen, and make it serve you, otherwise you fret yourself to incapability—and get nowhere.

Our habit of pushing on another hour or two when conditions happened to warrant adding to our day's mileage, often led us to some rather poor camps. The night we should have spent on the high, dry

Digitized by Google

ground of the abandoned old fort San Felipe, for instance, we camped some distance beyond on the edge of a swamp-like campo, where the piums nearly devoured us, but where, by way of recompense, I climbed to the view of a very beautifully coloured orchid relative.

Another experience I had a night or two later was equally diverting. Fifty yards from where we landed we discovered three travelling Indians bivouacked, and made coffee to lend a festal air to the occasion, my crew appearing to enjoy hugely the meeting and its flow of gossip, which lasted late. After we had retired I heard voices, obviously lowered and expectant. Turning out I discovered Ato to be the only one at hand, and the demijohn missing. Quietly stealing towards the talking I found Miguel and Leea and the three Indians sitting around a small fire, chattering in subdued tones; gesturing, laughing, evidently warming up for the anticipated good time. Approaching just as Leea was passing a cuia I seized and emptied it of the cachaca, and then taking the demijohn, ordered my men back to camp. The Indians moved as though to regain possession of the precious demijohn, but covering them with my revolver, I herded Leea and Miguel sulkily away, when backing into the dark, I sought a new camping spot for myself and the demijohn, quite apart from the others. To this, by way of safeguarding against vengeful impulse, I fetched also all the paddles of my uba. Soon a very heavy storm broke upon us, which no doubt cooled feverish tendencies, for when I roused my crew before dawn the revellers went to their work without hesitation.

Digitized by Google

They said nothing, nor did I. I did not see the other Indians, but thereafter I slept near the demijohn.

The next afternoon in crossing from one side to the other of the river, as some boulder filled, rapid water obliged us to do, and paddling our fastest, we struck a rock which Miguel should have avoided. The uba keeled over, half filling, and we all went overboard of course, but escaped with nothing worse than a thorough wetting and the loss of some pirarucu and tobacco. The day following (the fifth since leaving Forteleza) we got a three o'clock start, and at nine at night came to San Marcellinos.

Reaching San Marcellinos was like getting money from home. Not that it was any wonder town, consisting as it did of just one house; but because of its hospitality and gentle courtesy, for that one house was the home of Miguel Pecil, a trader with an eye to business, but the manners of a gentleman. He took me in, administering to my physical needs, and what was of more consequence undertook to facilitate my journey to San Carlos, where he prophesied I should be able to replenish my depleted provisions and without difficulty secure canoe and men for the trip across the isthmus of Javita on to San Fernando de Atabapo, where I hoped to outfit for a venture into the upper Orinoco and the unknown region beyond Esmeralda. How little he knew San Carlos as I was destined to find it! How little indeed these widely separated settlements seem to know of one another! Like tiny oases in the desert of uncompromising forest, each must be, and is, independent of the other; there is no intercourse and no communication except that brought by the occasional trading boat.

Digitized by Google

In addition to letting me have a few supplies in trade, Pecil helped me to get three new men, one to replace Leea, who had been stricken with fever, so that we were able to get away in the afternoon of the day after our arrival. Together with the steersman I had now a crew of five, which, including mine, meant five paddles, so we set out to make a record run to San Carlos, after first exchanging the uba for a canoe with board topsides called montaria, of less length but more breadth.

To doctor one of my men who had been stricken, we made an early first camp at Marabitanas, another abandoned fort on a most attractive site, which offers a fine view of the Cababuri, or Imeri Sierras, the long row of hills to the northeast, bearing isolated conical peaks. When we started on again we were minus one paddle, though later I picked up a stray Indian as we neared the Brazilian frontier. One hundred years ago this was a locality of much activity, but we saw only two deserted houses upon an open twelve foot bank (high for the Negro) in a cleared space of perhaps an acre, bitten out of the surrounding forest, a shattered flagstaff, a rotting lamp post leaning towards the setting sun across the river, and a rusted cannon of ancient make lying unmounted on the ground. Back to the northeast, rising solitary and majestic, is the Piedra de Cocui, a conical solid rock monument perhaps one thousand feet high, the only elevation above the forest level immediately on the river to be seen between here and Forteleza. Not a living creature appeared in sight as we paused to view the border line dividing

Digitized by Google

Brazil and Venezuela, save a large white crane, which flapped lazily away.

We had the good fortune above here to overtake an Indian who was visiting his "cakouri," as the fish trap is locally called, and we forthwith entered upon a trade with him. These traps are common to the river and are built in the shape of a triangle of slats of palm and set near, if not on, a point. Securing the fish after they are in the trap is by the very simple process of dropping into the triangle from on top and hand catching them. And since the water is clear, it was entirely possible for me to stand on the top an interested spectator of the manœuvering man and fish. By such traps and by shooting with arrows from small canoes in which they sneak along the river bank, the Indians get practically all their fish; and I was much more impressed by their waterman-ship than by their marksmanship.

We got three fish from the Indian, who went off happy with tobacco and a small horn of cachaca, and made our noon meal on the spot; I celebrated further with a bath and fresh clothes, which, together with the treat of fresh fish, made me feel quite civilized again. The truth is, the meal became a gorge, as such feasts are apt to be on a long and ill-provisioned trail; and when we started, the pace was sluggish. There is nothing like an empty stomach to spur one to endeavour. I've always remembered and usually acted upon what an old Hudson Bay Company factor told me at Great Slave Lake. He said that when he wished his voyagers to make good time, he gave them full rations for only three-quarters of the distance, which meant they must keep at top speed to have

Digitized by Google

the rations last out the full distance. The fact is, in my wilderness travel, I never found I need give myself much concern over rationing too liberally, and certainly along the flowing road the traveller who lives off the country (as he must much of the time) need have no fear of faring too sumptuously.

We made rather poor time for the balance of the day after the noon debauch, and a storm of unusual severity, but of wondrous beauty, came near to putting us out of business at one crossing of rapid water where the wind had lashed the current to a fury. I never shall forget the lightning—curious with its vivid flashes, rather than of the usual forked variety. It was as though a great illuminating flame suddenly flared up out of the blackness, and though it aided our progress, the thunder, which seemed to shake the very canoe, made the crew rather miserable. We kept at work, however, and when we finally tied up in the downpour I reckoned we were not over a good twelve hours paddling from San Carlos, which I expected to reach the next night.

But the flowing road is full of surprises that sadly interrupt schedules. Starting at two in the morning, we were swinging at a great rate just as day dawned, when a half covered rock we ran onto as we were steaming around a bend, turned the canoe partly over. We were speedily driven back by the current into the bushes, some of us swimming, the others holding the canoe, which, after partial bailing, we took farther along to a rocky point where we unpacked and bailed it thoroughly. It was surprising we did not at this and other upsets lose more things; the explanation of which is that they couldn't escape from the low set

Digitized by Google

toldo, the provisions at the back preventing the water having a clear sweep through. Nor did the wetting appear much to affect the mandioca; at least we ate it. What I regretted most of my losses on the Negro was that of the mata-mata turtle so rarely to be seen in captivity.

We lost two hours on account of the mishap, and before we started again the men must needs eat a while, but when I got off I kept them going until midnight, and early the next morning the long sought San Carlos loomed on the bank ahead of us.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VII

THE DIVIDE OF THE FLOWING ROAD

When you have pictured a Mecca, it's not easy to be reconciled to a Gehenna. And as I looked upon the bedraggled settlement we had now come to, I could scarce believe it to be the San Carlos towards which my eyes for so long had been directed. Standing on a clear, comparatively high bank, the settlement had appeared quite imposing from the river, but after we landed, it developed into a woebegone collection of houses squatting dejectedly around a large flagstaff bearing plaza, grass grown, and equally neglected.

Here, in 1801, Alexander von Humboldt, the great German explorer, terminated his journey from the north, and fifty years later, the famous English naturalist, Alfred Wallace, passed through on the way to Javita, his most northerly point. Both write of San Carlos (which by the way is from four to five hundred feet elevation above sea level) as Venezuela's chief frontier post, having much trade and a large amount of self-esteem. But, in common with all the old posts on the upper Rio Negro, its glory and its trade have vanished, and it looked, at the time of my visit, as though self-respect also was going rapidly. In the days of its prosperity it supported upwards of two hundred inhabitants; I found it with not more than fifty, I should say at a rough guess, who were actually in residence.

The Commandante, to whom I carried Pecil's letter, received me politely, but on learning my desire

Digitized by Google

for supplies, a canoe, and men, he exclaimed with increasing emphasis and shrugging shoulders, "Nada Senor, nada, nada" (nothing). And I feared he hadn't exaggerated local conditions when I looked around the room of his home in which we held our conference, and over the dozen or so of men that crowded upon us, raising a babel of suggestion. It was a scene eloquent with the story of San Carlos decadence. The whitewashed walls of the adobe were entirely without ornament and badly in need of freshening; the floor was bare and worn, while the entire furniture comprised a table, and three chairs which had seen better days. On one of these I sat with extreme care and some uncertainty of equilibrium, and between the Commandante and me, on the third one, perched a cavernous-mouthed individual who appeared to regard himself as the interlocutor of the occasion. When I did not at once comprehend what the Commandante said in his too rapid speech, this creature, peering anxiously into my face for the dawn of understanding, and missing it, would forthwith render his own version at the top of his loud voice, to my distress, as though deafness were my trouble, rather than faltering Spanish.

Every one in the room took his cue from the Commandante; was, in a word, polite and discouraging. They were unanimously of the opinion that neither men nor a canoe could be engaged, and as for provisions, they had not enough for themselves, they said, but would sell me a few small (five cent) boxes of matches at the equivalent of fifty cents the box. If I would be patient, perhaps "poco-poco" (little by little) I should be able to pick up a crew, and maybe a canoe. Meantime, they assured me, in

Digitized by Google

the meaningless form of the country, that the town and all therein was at my disposition. Now, indeed, did I begin to fully appreciate, by comparison, the considerate helpfulness of Miguel Pecil—*el caballero del alto Rio Negro.*

"Poco-poco" was no new expression to me; it had become a familiar of my South American adventures, though the situation here did in truth seem more than usually hopeless. When, however, you have reached a divisional milestone in your journey, marking the final stretch, you're not likely to give up until you come to the last ditch; and I did not consider I had yet reached that boundary.

Taking advantage of the Commandante's proffered hospitality (the howling gentleman having locked his house and gone away after urging the "poor honour" of its liberty upon me, with truly simulated Venezuelan humility) I moved my belongings into an adjoining empty room and, locking it, went forth to replace my crew, which, following the custom of the river (of every borderland river in fact), would go no farther. Indians will engage to go only to a locality or into a region known to them. Rarely can you induce them to venture beyond.

All that day, and far into the night, I searched unceasingly for a canoe, the inhabitants viewing my anxious diligence with apathetic and undisguised amusement. They'd all listen politely, then shrug their shoulders as they repeated the dread word "nada"; others leaned against the door scratching and mute. Everyone appeared to be scratching, though the mosquitoes seemed to be not so vicious as to warrant such industry. If you meet a copperish-

Digitized by Google

AN INSTANCE OF THE GREAT BOULDER BANK, OFTEN SEEN ON THE UPPER NEGRO

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

complexioned gentleman, one hand scratching his posterior, the other working feverishly over the upper body under the shirt, set him down from San Carlos by the Casiquiare, upon whose official seal should be a man couchant scratching, on a forest background, with bugs rampant.

At last, in the early afternoon of the second day, I secured a montaria; and it was the identical canoe I had uncovered at the very outset of my quest, only to be positively informed by the Commandante that it could not be hired! By four o'clock, aided this time by the Commandante, I had pledged six men and ordered an immediate start, much to the disgust of the prospective crew and all their friends, who demurred on the plea of its being so near night. But I persisted, and together with cajolery and promise of extra presents, we pushed off in the rain about an hour before dark. We camped only a little way up the river, where the men got all the post gossip and excitement of leaving out of their system, and in the morning, before dawn, were under way and going fine. Thus, that one hour of light had really saved a day, as in quitting their home post for such a trip, men need a night's sleep to shake them down to the humdrum work of the voyage. That is why, on such journeys, I invariably plan and allow for a late afternoon start from a new point of departure, especially if it is a settlement. In that way all the lingering and otherwise delaying farewells and the general dilly-dallying which precedes actual getting away do not matter; and in the morning we are settled to business.

Now curiously, and by way of recompense for its

Digitized by Google

other deficiencies, San Carlos gave me the best crew I had at any time on the Negro. They were all Indians or Venezuelan half-breeds, much superior to the Brazilian cross, and the zip they put into their paddles encouraged me to feel that we should arrive at San Fernando de Atabapo before the nine days habitually allotted to the trip had expired. They made me hustle, I can tell you, to keep in beat with the usual working stroke, and when they resorted to the fancy rapid-fire stunts of the expert I joined the "also ran" class.

Starting about four of this first morning we camped for breakfast in less than three hours at the mouth of the ill-famed Casiquiare River, half a mile wide, where it discharges into the Negro, and while we cooked one of the numerous curassow relatives I had shot, received a generous dose of the insects with which its notorious white waters are plentifully supplied.

From here the Rio Negro becomes narrower, showing some islands, smaller than below, and a cooler atmosphere of from 85° to 90° by day and 72° to 76° at night, probably caused by the wind and rain, which were a considerable factor hereabouts. Bearing more westerly than hitherto, the river runs past Maroa, where it takes a decided slant towards the setting sun and finally turns almost abruptly south. Somewhere between San Carlos and Maroa the Negro changes its name to Guainia, increases its pace, and along its sides and turns replaces with rocks, the great banks of sand which we had seen below San Carlos standing out of water two or three feet, and extending at times a hundred yards or more. The

Digitized by Google

Indians say fish are scarce, and certainly I saw none of the traps common to the lower river. In general appearance it is much like the Negro—the low banks being covered by the same monotonous forest hedge. But its waters are deceptive. Unbroken in its middle course, you do not appreciate the force of the current until you attempt to cross; then as, out of the corner of your eye, you see with dismay the canoe slipping steadily backward despite your desperate paddling, you realize the hidden power of that smooth flowing, deep, black body.

We met one canoe of four Indians, and passed several deserted houses in one of which we slept, or rather the crew did; I remained in the uba, and, incidentally, was surprised at their burning the lantern all night, curled round it like dogs before a fire. We were running our day's travel late into the night, starting as early as two-thirty or three in the morning, and encountering storm constantly, often obliged to lay behind a boulder point until some particularly severe gust had eased a bit so we might circumvent safely the rocks which continued to come more and more in evidence as we advanced. For one wild, beautiful stretch the river narrows to three hundred yards racing through two upstanding great rocks, which cut the water into cross currents extremely difficult to negotiate. And on the day following, at noon, in a blinding rain storm and a breeze which brought the mercury down to 84°, we arrived at another post of departed glory and trade, Maroa, once a thriving centre of boat building, in the days when native products went out by the Negro rather than by the Orinoco, as most of what is left does now.

Digitized by Google

Where the Guainia, locally spelled "Gauynia," bends to the south, we left it and entered the Pimichin, a winding little river which maintains a general northerly course, averaging in width about thirty to forty feet, though at times of low water narrowing to twenty, and in the full of the wet season spreading to seventy-five feet or more. Feeling our way slowly through the storm and the dark, saved several times from upsetting only by the high skill of Geronomo, as I christened the patrón, we came finally, near ten o'clock that night, to the Puerto, the lower gate of the ten mile land neck which separates two of the world's greatest river basins—the mighty Amazon with its multiple feeders at the south, the wide draining Orinoco on the north.

No one lives on the south side of the portage, but we found a squaw and a young Indian camped in the lee of a big boulder at the beginning of the forest trail to Javita on the north end, and I tried without success to induce one or the other to go over the mountain for carriers, that we might have them in the morning, and so get my cargo across without delay. But they refused, declaring the trail "muy malo" (very bad) with snakes and tigre plentiful. Then I endeavoured, and likewise failed, to persuade one of my own Indians to go with me. They protested against travel at night on road avowedly disreputable, which none had passed over except by day. So we sat around the boulder talking it out while I expressed myself as plainly as I could on their faint heartedness, and sought to tempt one of the lot to show me the way. At last the lanky Tomaso agreeing to go, we started forthwith;—and soon discovered that the squaw had correctly described the road as "muy malo."

Digitized by Google

It was in truth as rough a ten miles as ever I covered on tropical trail. In the days gone when Pimichin lived and the portage was a busy highway the path was periodically cleared of encroaching jungle and fallen trees by the Indians, who went in bodies, because this isthmus always has had an evil reputation for jaguar and especially for snakes. However exaggerated the snake stories may be (as such stories unfailingly are), there is no lack of foundation for the characterization of the road itself. It is but an indistinct trail, which, when not obliterated by the unusually severe rain storms common to this section, winds through swamp and over mountain, crossing several little streams where the spanning logs that once served to make fair passage have rotted until they are worse than no bridge at all.

We picked our way without too much hinderance until we had gone a third of the distance, when Tomaso falling broke the lantern glass and the storm made relighting an impossibility. As fast and as often as Tomaso succeeded in bringing a flame to life the wind killed it. In fact, he wasted so much time with the lantern that I took it away; whereupon he refused to go forward, saying he was afraid without a light. I did my persuasive best, offering presents, but could not move him until in sheer desperation I assumed the rôle of boss, sliding my revolver holster ostentatiously to the front of my belt as though to back up my commands. It was a resort I did not relish, I confess, but I was bound to overcome the obstacles in my path, and to use the most effective means at hand. Otherwise, I should still be floundering somewhere along the flowing road.

So we went stumblingly along through mud and

Digitized by Google

water, occasionally to the waist, often to the knees, and always ankle deep in the swampland; climbing over fallen trees or balancing ourselves along the full length of wind-falls that saved us from more wading; trailing vines catching our feet and stubborn undergrowth slapping our faces. In such going, the recurring prophecy of snakes was not calculated to be comforting; but I got consolation from the other thought that, never but once in all my wilderness wanderings, had I found anything so evil as painted. And so it proved with the snakes. Of course we "heard things" repeatedly to the fright of Tomaso and my own disturbance I frankly acknowledge, but at all events by a little after four o'clock in the morning, we had arrived unscathed, if bedraggled, at Javita across the "mountain" portage.

Within an hour I had ten Indians, men, women and boys, on the road to the Puerto at Pimichin, where they arrived at eleven. Two hours later they were returning with my cargo distributed among them in small packs, which they carried on their heads topped by large trailing palm leaves as protection against alternating sun and rain, and suggesting at a distance nothing so much in appearance as the frequently seen moving column of great sauba ants half concealed by their burden of leaves.

By daylight the portage revealed a large proportion of above the average big trees, especially cedars and ceibas, in the very dense forest; but the especial interest to me, and the real motive of my more or less sentimental journey hither, was a sight of some of the fast disappearing log skids, across which for four days Humboldt and his twenty-three men had drag-

Digitized by Google

JAVITA,

WHICH HUMBOLDT AND WALLACE FOUND PEOPLED AND PROSPEROUS, BUT WHICH NOW HAS BUT A FEW FAMILIES OF INDIANS WHO EKE OUT A BARE EXISTENCE

MY CAMP ON THE NECK OF LAND DIVIDING THE ORINOCO AND THE AMAZON RIVER SYSTEMS. FROM HERE WE PORTAGED TO JAVITA

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

ged his canoe to Pimichin over one hundred years ago.

The trail made good its evil name on the return trip, one of the carriers being struck by a four foot long, white bellied brownish snake. Although I killed the serpent the entire party fled terror stricken towards Javita, now not far, carrying the fainting man whose wound they dressed (and cured) with a brew of some vegetable antidote, leaving me chasing the most superb butterfly I saw in all South America. The rain had ceased at about four in the afternoon, and the sun blazed out as we drew near the more open upland pass, giving us such a steaming as I have not often endured. Here just ahead of me fluttered this marvellously coloured insect, as large as my hand, of royal purple with light blue under wings. Up and down the trail, and deep into the woods on both sides, careless of lurking serpents, I ran after that beautiful flutterer without avail. I could get within a foot or two, but always it evaded the eager reaching hand; and as I pursued it, I remember I wondered how such lovely life keeps dry. Where do they hide during the soaking and long-continued rains?

The unkempt Indian pueblo of Javita offers another illustration of the unprosperous days which have fallen upon all the little settlements between San Gabriel and San Fernando de Atabapo. When Humboldt passed through, and again in the day of Wallace (1851), it was a flourishing village supporting from one hundred and fifty to two hundred contented souls. On this, my first visit (1906), a large majority of the houses were deserted, and I doubt if even a score of adults could have mustered. Humboldt was able to restock his supplies; Wallace out-

Digitized by Google

fitted here for his return trip to San Carlos; they could spare me barely enough for one meal! As I grew more and more familiar with the impoverished conditions and moribund tribes, it was hard to realize that this neck of land had been a bone of vigorous contention between the Spaniards and the Portuguese in the middle of the eighteenth century.

Diversion of trade is largely answerable for the decline of San Carlos, San Gabriel, Maroa, Javita and the other impaired river ports, but also the nomadic nature of the natives must share responsibility for the general deterioration. Not that they are hunters; the density of the forests does not favour the chase, and in truth, amid the teeming wild animal life comparatively few species along the flowing road may be classed as edible—viz., rodents, peccaries, deer in the outskirts of the woodland, and the timid tapir of the interior; also the curassows.

Thus it is that the Indians turn to the rivers where fish abound, and where they can the more readily clear a spot for a planting of the mandioca and plantains, which they abandon usually after the second year for virgin soil. They make less of their natural resources than almost any primitive folk I have visited. This ought to be a land of plenty, for with scarcely any care all the southern fruits and vegetables will grow, and the rivers are full of fish; yet, throughout the about three thousand miles I paddled first and last over the flowing road (not counting duplications) a household along the way with to-morrow's dinner in the larder was the exception. Fancy going hungry alongside a river!

It is reckoned a voyage of three days and nights

Digitized by Google

from Javita down the Temi to the Atabapo River, and so on to the town of San Fernando; but we made the distance between five o'clock of an afternoon and ten o'clock of the morning of the second day (thus taking seven days from San Carlos to San Fernando) notwithstanding we had to lay to for an hour or so at midnight on account of a storm which all but swamped us. But it was a joyful trip despite the hard work and the frequent heavy rain. The country had quite changed. In place of the unbroken forest line there were now occasional open spots of rolling land, refreshing indeed, after long travel between hedge-like banks. Even where the forest reached to the river, a low bank was often visible, while the relieving grace of palms in close growing groups or scattered individuals lifted the gloom of the otherwise compact foliage. In places, what appeared to be mangroves covered low banks, even extending out into the water quite after the inland manner of Sumatran and Malayan rivers.

Once in a while we saw islands, now grown smaller in size and fewer in number, having sometimes a shore line of fine white sand, but more often of the boulders, which also armoured most of the points I observed as we sped past. Yes, "sped" is now the word, for we were going down-stream—the first relaxation after weeks of hard, continuous struggling against a strong current. Ah! the joy of being able to rest your paddle and know that the river itself is carrying you on at the rate of four or five miles an hour, instead of hurling its great weight against you! Only the man who has bent over a paddle day after day in the stress of up-river work can appreciate the sensation of watching

Digitized by Google

the bank glide by and keep on gliding while you indolently fill your pipe, trusting to the steersman to hold the canoe in its course. Now, for the first time, too, we were keeping the middle of the stream, where there were no insects to torture and no tree branches to rip the toldo or shower us with ants. The long bends we had toiled around for two hours at a time we now left behind in ten to twenty minutes. It was a veritable joy ride.

But San Fernando, where I planned to outfit for an expedition to the headwaters of the Orinoco River, proved to be a sad sequel. A hardluck tale is not interesting to anyone but yourself, and this one differs little from the rest of its class. Suffice it to say my cup overflowed. The crew I managed to get hold of after much manœuvering would not take me where I wished to go. I had to leave them on the river shortly after starting, and finally to abandon my project and make my bitterly disappointed way out to that other San Fernando on the Apure.

The good Lord has done much for San Fernando on the Atabapo River in the way of attractive environment, but man has made very little of the natural endowment. Situated practically at the meeting of the rivers Guaviare, Atabapo and Orinoco (seven hundred miles from the sea), it is headquarters for the small amount of rubber gathered on these rivers and the upper Negro, as well as for the piassava industry which occupies the Indians hereabouts. Being the largest settlement between Ciudad Bolívar on the north, and Manaos on the south, one is inclined perhaps to expect too much of it. At least, I found it rather insolent and crude; an uninviting assembly

Digitized by Google

of adobes, and either a gun or a knife on the belt of many of its men.

If ever this region becomes settled, San Fernando should develop into one of the most important inland cities of South America. But will this section ever be livable? Not for generations upon generations of pioneers, in my opinion; and only in the comparatively elevated regions. The blanket of forest (a standing menace); the difficulties of travel (in large areas possible only by canoe); the insects (a pest beyond belief everywhere except on black waters) convince me that no industrial impression will ever be made upon this land until an army of immigrants simultaneously attack a given section with provisions and means sufficient to support them a few years until they have overcome the jungle and attained to dependable harvests. It's no place for the lone farmer. The tropical growth encroaches too rapidly upon a small clearing to allow of successful results in occasional or individual agricultural effort.

And this is reckoning without the insect host, or the fever—a forbidding pair!

I feel that the next adventurer whose response to the wanderlust carries him across my tracks here, will find San Fernando as I left it. No doubt its chance would be improved were it possible to eliminate the thirty to forty miles of rocks and rapids which connect the forbidding cataracts of Atures and Maipures to make of them a natural barrier to upper Orinoco navigation; but there they stand, and there they will stand long after man has ceased troubling.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER VIII

THROUGH THE GATEWAY OF THE EL DORADO

On the Mapa Fisico y Politico de Venezuela (1884) Maroa stands forth in the heavy black letters by which we are accustomed to recognize important centres; in reality it is a group of palm and adobe houses fewer in number than the sorry collection at San Carlos, one hundred miles down the river, but having a larger portion inhabited, and all of them more sightly. Yet Maroa came honestly by her distinction long since passed into tradition save among the map-makers of upper South America. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the armed peace established between the Spaniards of Venezuela and the Portuguese of Brazil, nourished—at wide intervals along the Rio Negro between San Carlos and San Gabriel—thriving settlements which served as frontier posts to safeguard the trade that displaced the bitter if desultory warfare previously existing.

Of these settlements none prospered more than Maroa, peculiarly favoured by its location to the course of traffic. Three or four days' journey to the south of it the Casiquiare, entering the Rio Negro, thus joins the Orinoco and the Amazon river systems to establish the world's most extended flowing road; while almost directly opposite on the Negro, the six-league Pimichin provides another connecting link with the Orinoco via the ten-mile portage to Javita and the Atabapo River. It is a natural trans-shipping point, and became in those days a frontier ship-

Digitized by Google

yard of renown. Master-workmen came from Spain, Indians abandoned the jungle to apprentice themselves to the new trade, and the fame of Maroa as a builder of canoes and freight-boats spread far. It was the golden age of the alto Rio Negro.

Other near-by smaller hamlets—Tomo, San Miguel—flourished from sheer force of juxtaposition. The Jesuit missions multiplied, to the well-being of the natives, who had suffered much during the wanton activities of those undaunted though merciless pioneers, the Conquistadores; for here, too, had been set up a gateway to the El Dorado by one of the hardiest of the intrepids—Lope de Aguirre, the "Wanderer"—who in 1561 passed up the Casiquiare looking for storied treasure.

For the better part of two centuries, indeed, had the reported riches of this mysterious land been noised about the small world, calling soldiers of fortune to every gateway and putting in motion a series of daring explorations never since equalled. From the Meta River on the north to the Caqueta (a north branch of the Amazon) on the south; from the Andes' Cordilleras on the west to the Rio Negro and the Orinoco on the east—so ranged the fabled land where gold and precious stones were said to await the successful adventurer. Von Huten searched the wilderness between the Guaviare River, which empties into the Orinoco at San Fernando de Atabapo, and the Uaupes, entering the Rio Negro just above San Gabriel. Ordaz, a captain of Cortes, in 1531 surveyed the Orinoco as far as Atures, the north end of the great cataracts; Herrera went up the Meta via the Orinoco four years later; Orellana in 1561 voyaged

Digitized by Google

down the Amazon; Quesada hunted far to the west and south, even into Peru. And all the while the restless Caribs spread the fable along their voyages, which began at the mouth of the Orinoco and extended south to the Rio Negro.

What energy they had!—those first pioneers and their immediate followers, who, so early as 1776, had built a chain of blockhouses reaching from San Carlos, north to the lower Orinoco, across a country now rated as "unexplored." Their zeal and enterprise under the tremendous obstacles of forest and climate and insect pest is no less astounding than is the now complete abandonment of a region once so valorously secured.

And with the blockhouses and the soldiers shortly thereafter disappeared the missions, which from early in the eighteenth century had been numerous and populous—a haven for the Indians and a stimulant to trade. Even in 1801, when the great Humboldt made his monumental trip from the Apure River to Esmeralda on the Orinoco, he found missions throughout the full length of his course. Now, however, the missions are deserted; Maroa builds no boats, and El Dorado is only a historic incident of which few living today in the land of its nativity have scarcely even heard.

No; Maroa is not the kind of place one would visit a second time without urgent need, and the very good reason that took me there again was to seek a crew for a venture into the Orinoco head-waters.

Since the defeat of my first attempt I had studied long and exhaustively the question of the most ad-

Digitized by Google

vantageous point of departure, and how best to make my sally into this forbidding up-river region.

Before I had obtained intimate acquaintance with this particular country and people, my plan was to ascend the Orinoco from Atabapo, making a side trip up the Ventuario, which has always fascinated me as being the flowing division of the sixteenth-century highway to the lower Orinoco via a mountain (Maigualida) portage and the Caura River. But, with the advantage of one visit to San Fernando de Atabapo, I knew through unhappy failure something of the difficulty of securing voyagers at that townlet, which devotes itself chiefly to rubber and piassava, and when not so occupied prefers to stay at home and enjoy itself. I still retained a vivid remembrance of my previous year's conflict with the men, who though engaged to take me up-river, persisted in going down-stream, and finally (when I refused to go farther in the direction opposite to my arrangement and desire) taking my canoe and provisions, abandoned me at a two-hut settlement not very far below the Ventuario.

With experience bought dearly at both ends of the line therefore on two separate occasions, my best chance of getting help seemed to be among these Indians of Javita and Maroa. My most direct course I calculated to be one of the caños coming into the Guainia from the east, which are locally thought to make their way far inland, and in one or more instances believed to cross entirely to the Casiquiare River. In other words, instead of retracing the Guainia, as the Rio Negro is here called, and then having one hundred and fifty miles of the pestif-

Digitized by Google

erous Casiquiare to cover before reaching the Orinoco, my simple scheme was to cut across from somewhere in the neighbourhood of Maroa, thus saving, if I got through, a good half of the Casiquiare's length—the lower and worse half which winds part way round the compass and over troublesome rapids before flowing west into the Negro. My ambition was not to explore the Casiquiare of notorious and deserved reputation for insect pest, but to arrive on the upper Orinoco with certainty and with the least possible delay. Apart, too, from shortening the distance, the caño route appealed to me because the marauders of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are said to have used such by-paths from the Guainia to the Casiquiare to outwit their less adventuresome compatriots in pillage; and the Portuguese slave traders also travelled these short cuts to reach the then Spanish territory.

But it is one thing to work out a plan as you lie on your back staring at the stars, and quite another to put it into execution. Although I came to Maroa, I was none too hopeful of success. To begin with, there was the handicap of communicating with these Indians, whose patois of mixed native and Spanish I could comprehend not at all beyond what their gestures conveyed; and though they understood some simple straight Spanish, they were slow to catch my meaning—slower than any I met in this section, where every other Indian village has a tongue of its own. Such dialectic variance is reported also on many of the tributaries of the Rio Negro, where the original speech appears to have merged with the Spanish or Portuguese to make a linguistic mess requiring es-

Digitized by Google

THE ISOLATED CONICAL MOUNTS RISING OUT OF THE FLAT LAND TYPICAL OF THE UPPER RIO NEGRO

THE INDIAN FISH TRAP OF THE UPPER NEGRO

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

pecial study. I do not pretend to discuss this evolution; it is one quite beyond me, a mere wilderness traveller of no scientific learning on the subject, but I do testify to its confounding existence.

Somewhat increasing my problem, too, was the absence—at Atabapo, I learned—of the head-man, so I was left to do my own skirmishing; not a novel situation for me, nor an unwelcome one. I have nearly always, in the long run, got more satisfactory results in the wilderness by dealing direct with men than through an intermediary. What did seriously hinder me, however, was native disinclination to enter the unknown, and especially the Orinoco beyond Esmeralda, commonly regarded throughout all this region as a land of mystery peopled by savages. To make bad matters worse, it happened also to be late in April, and after the last fishing excursion to the Casiquiare until the end of the wet season; for whether because the fish do not bite or because of custom—my limited converse with them could not discover—the Indians do their fishing during the dry period.

Since the departed days of boat-building, life is not easy with these Indians. The course of trade has shifted, no development has retrieved the deflection, and they live miserably and dwindle unceasingly. Wallace, in 1851, found from three hundred and fifty to four hundred people divided between Maroa and Javita; and both he and Humboldt before him refer to thriving colonies around the missions all along the river to San Carlos. I doubt if I saw one hundred, and not many in that vicinity escaped me first and last. These occupy themselves mostly by gathering piassava, or serving as carriers on the portage between

Digitized by Google

Pimichin and Javita, whence the canoes go down to San Fernando de Atabapo, which in a trade sense drains the upper Rio Negro, as it does also the upper Orinoco country; a condition which further and more fully explains the lost commercial glory of San Carlos and other of the one-time fairly well-to-do little settlements on the upper Negro.

This piassava is a black, coarse fibre parasite, which entwines the trunk, but more plentifully the base of the stems of a palm growing on nearly all the smaller streams that extend back into the swampish sections, where, like rubber, it appears to thrive best if not exclusively—although my knowledge is not sufficiently exact to give that statement authority. Wallace says it is not found on the main rivers, and I never saw it except on flood-land or near a lagoon. Unwound from the palm and with no treatment whatever, this fibre is forwarded to Atabapo, where it is braided into the rope of the country or distributed in bulk to Bolívar for the making elsewhere of the finished product. It is not as strong as manila fibre, but very stout none the less; I saw cables of it in use on the docks at Manaos, and all the freight-bateláos and canoes of the flowing road have no other rope.

Thus nature seems to have sought in a measure to recompense the impoverishment of this passing people by distributing among them with a lavish hand one of the most useful of her many gifts.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER IX

TO THE UPPER ORINOCO VIA THE CASIQUIARE

The Indians I fell among were friendly and disposed to lend a hand to my project. By promise of ample reward and by dint of playing on their curiosity, perhaps entertaining them—who knows?—with some of the, to them, novelties of my equipment, I aroused their interest. They seemed to get great fun out of my collapsible canvas bucket; and when I filled the filter with muddy water and delivered a clean cupful there was a real sensation. They examined, tasted, and treated the exhibition as a miracle. I think I derived as much amusement as they. Whatever the contributing cause, within four days I had secured six men and a canoe—also one of the beautifully woven grass hammocks made by up-Guainia Indians—and we set out to execute my plan of reaching the Casiquiare by canoe overland so to say.

This section we are about entering is worth a word, for it is like a great delta of the Orinoco, Casiquiare, Guainia or Negro, and Atabapo Rivers; being entirely encompassed by those streams, except for a small neck in the northwest which attaches it to the mainland. It is wedge-shaped, about one hundred and fifty miles long, and not over fifty broad at the top, expanding to probably one hundred miles along the Casiquiare. The Orinoco bounds its northern as well as its eastern face; the straighter western boundary is formed by the Guainia and the Atabapo. Each one of these boundary rivers flows in a different

Digitized by Google

direction. The Orinoco slopes to the northwest; the Casiquiare southwest; the Atabapo northward; and the Guainia toward the northeast. Roughly this tract is estimated as having an area of three thousand square miles, but there is little if any real information concerning the character of its interior. One can judge only from what one has seen on the several river-banks and from what one hears in the country—a good half of which must be liberally discounted.

So far as I could discover, it is uninhabited and untravelled except when Indians cruise after the ducks, which in March make this region a popular resting-point on their northward flight. On the Atabapo side the forest is heaviest. Along the Casiquiare, for the most part, there appears the same dense, hedge-like growth reaching to the water's edge as on the Rio Negro. The truth is that river fronts are much alike over all South America, and jungle country is jungle country, whether in Argentine, Brazil or Venezuela. From the Orinoco side the delta is a great, flat waste, except in the northeast for one more example of those conical rock familiars of this Road.

Tradition says the interior contains several lagoons or ponds of fair size, and a century-old map I saw at Bolívar (of which, thanks to the courtesy of a German trader, I secured the much prized copy reproduced in this chapter), indicates one or two of goodly area. On the other hand, Humboldt, whose investigations along the route he pursued were very thorough and much more likely to be accurate, prints none and speaks of none; it is true, however, the great German explorer did not make the traverse, and, therefore, depended on hearsay

Digitized by Google

evidence. Whether or not there are lakes must remain unanswered until a crossing is made of the sections where they are alleged to be. No lakes were revealed by my journey, although the caño did at one remembered place open out into what might be called a pond of fair size; and there were other sections we passed through which afforded lagoon opportunities in high water.

Ponds in these districts of little rivers or caños—themselves largely the inland overflow of the main stream—are, in my opinion, entirely a matter of season. Land so flat as this basin, with its chief river rising thirty or even forty feet in three months, offers wide possibilities in this respect. The caño through which I paddled in April, might, and very likely did, by the close of the rainy season, swell to a river. The first time I ascended Pimichin it was a twenty-foot wide canal sunk in a tortuous granite bed, hampered with rock obstructions difficult to avoid; on the next occasion I paddled over a stream from seventy-five to one hundred feet broad without a check. Toward the close of the rainy season I have navigated caños where, during the dry weather, there wasn't water enough to make a puddle. Perhaps the most notable example of such variability is the Apure River, which at its lowest accommodates very light-draught trading-boats with difficulty, and when full floats easily and to spare the large steamers that voyage to Bolívar.

Those familiar with the arroyo freshets of our own Southwest, which, within an hour, turn dry sand bottoms into raging torrents you cannot ford, will appreciate the whimsical streams of South America, where,

Digitized by Google

however, fluctuations are of months' duration instead of hours'. Records must be made at the same site in both seasons—wet and dry, high and low water—otherwise they are almost worthless, for what one observer notes in February not at all describes what he or another sees in June.

I was astonished at the width of the caño we entered a short distance below Maroa, and at its current. Based on my inland explorations from the bateláo to San Gabriel the year before, I fancied the caño slightly more than a canal, with a feeble, if any, current. Here, however, was one but little short of a hundred yards wide where it flowed into the Rio Negro, and with a current strong enough to make our paddling by no means a summer-day's jaunt; in truth, good, stiff work more fittingly describes it—though not to compare with up-river labour, of course. The changing colour of the water also offered material for speculation, and amid the depressing uncertainty which enveloped me, brought the first hope of our being able to make the traverse.

One of the phenomena of this land of waters is the retention by each river of its own colour without diffusion to the very point of actual contact, even where the rivers differ vastly in volume. Black waters flow into white, and white empty into black, retaining their individuality up to the very edge; a visible line of demarcation—on one side white, on the other side black, unmingled and unexplained. Thus the puny black Atabapo joins the surging white Orinoco with no loss of integrity; the black Negro receives almost at right angles the odious white Casiquiare without contamination, and itself empties into

Digitized by Google

the Amazon, not so much as tingeing the mud-coloured waters of that monster river. Humboldt reports on the lower Casiquiare, which I did not visit, a black and a white stream, both coming from the east; while of the rivers flowing in from the west, some are of white and some of black water. Dr. Hamilton Rice declares the upper Uaupes to be white, while the lower section in granite districts is black water, as are also two tributaries, one coming in on the north, the other on the south. Of the number of small streams coming into the upper Casiquiare from the east, those I noted were olive.

These colours, which among white waters range from the really white Branco through many yellowish mud shades, and of black waters, from the greenish and bluish and deep brownish to the really deep, almost black of the upper Negro, are explained, the scientists maintain, by the character of the soil whence they take their source and through which they flow. Those rising among the decaying roots, leaves, and vegetable matter of the forests are the black, and those that have their source and course in the clayey and alluvial soils are the white waters. Yet the Orinoco rises in the heart of the forested mountains and flows under their very shadow on the north until it sends off the Casiquiare to the south.

When, therefore, after two days, I noticed the alteration of our caño water from a greenish black to a yellowish olive, I knew we were being defiled by the Casiquiare and rejoiced in its happy augury. On the evening of that same day the patrón attracted my attention by waving his arms in large fashion to the west of north, and saying, "Camino Atabapo";

Digitized by Google

by which I understood him to mean that the source of the Atabapo River was within reach of a not too far portage, and one could cross in high water and so journey to San Fernando. Perhaps my imagination filled in more than he intended to convey, for, while the patrón talked on to considerable length, the only other word I rescued out of his patois was "otra," which means other—*i.e.*, other road to San Fernando de Atabapo than the usual one of travel from Javita—as I interpreted it. As I have already related, communication between us, limited to signs and a few words, was not such deprivation in the canoe as it had appeared on shore. When you are bending your back to the paddle there is neither the time nor the inclination for conversation—simple words and a very small number of them fulfill all requirements. "Go," "stop," "no," "yes," "good," "bad," "eat," constitute an elaborate vocabulary when you're hustling along by the sweat of your brow from daylight till dark with brief halts for eating.

Apropos of eating, mandioca and dried fish made the substance of our daily fare. I had hoped on setting out to reach here in March, when ducks are plentiful, but one cannot so reckon on the flowing road, and I was far behind my original schedule, so carefully worked out—in New York. After my San Fernando experience I would not have been surprised to find myself reduced to feeding on heron—that later-season leathery tidbit which the Indians are frequently thankful to devour, so pressed for food are they at times.

We got no fish in the caño—we made no attempt

Digitized by Google

THE PESTIFEROUS CASIQUIARE

MY CREW AND CANOE UP THE CASIQUIARE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

to get any; I tolerated no delay during daylight, even for the purpose of securing fresh food, and the rain and the fatigue dulled sporting proclivities at night. The truth is, we saw no fish, and, come to think of it, I do not recall seeing fish in any caño, though I know of no good reason why there should not be, unless because of the unstability of the stream. Moreover, I was given to understand there is not much life in this basin save when the ducks visit it, but I saw several of the herons, and a busy member of the bobtail gallinule family, which always amused me by their brisk industry and indifference to other near-by birds. And if I did not hear that extraordinary pumping of the bittern, I certainly heard its counterfeit. Of frogs and bats there was no limit. One marvels at the myriads of batrachians along the South American waterways. On the rivers the night clamour beggars description; one must hear it if he would fully realize what a din these lowliest among the lowly of God's creatures can raise when chorusing in countless thousands.

Rounding a bend on the third day, with rain beating upon the surface of the water so hard that it sputtered under the impact, the patrón sighted a jaguar, and stopped us in much excitement by his whispered warning. Through the downpour, which unquestionably had deadened our noisy paddling, it was not at first so simple as it reads to discover the beast crouching at the water's edge of a point sixty or seventy feet away. But when I made him out he was a good mark, almost side on, and two soft-nosed balls from a 9-millimeter Mannlicher turned

Digitized by Google

him over on the top of the covered bank he had sought at the first shot, not fifty feet from where he was when first seen by us.

The Indians were stirred to gleefulness by the firing, but responded with exasperating slowness to my urgent signals for landing, as I could not from the canoe see the result of my shots, and was, of course, keen to get on the spoor of the quarry. Finally setting me ashore, they remained afloat until I shouted, "Bueno!" the local equivalent for all right. Even though thus assured, they came cautiously, almost as though stalking the big cat in life. And I must say I respected their fear, armed as they were with only bow and arrows, suitable enough for the timorous capybara, the agouti, or others such; but no more than irritating to an animal so powerful, and, when aroused, so ferocious as the jaguar. It would give me great joy to watch, under such conditions and equipment, one of that pooh-poohing tribe of near-hunters who skirt the jungle for copy and at their club "smokers" make every native apprehension an excuse for raillery. There would be a recanting, I warrant you.

Over all South America the natives justly dread the jaguar, not so much on account of its aggressive nature, as because of their own unpreparedness to oppose its occasional attack with any hope of success; and in every local mouth are the fanciful, exaggerated stories of the man-eating propensities we find recounted with all faith and solemnity in tourist tales. True, it is the most powerful and the most savage of the New World cats, but, like all members of the family, from the majestic tiger to the poor cougar,

Digitized by Google

which men dog-chase up trees to then shoot or rope in the delusion that they are treading the way of "ye mighty hunter," the jaguar will, almost as a rule, get out of your path.

Purely out of curiosity it may follow man, and in rare cases may attack, either in imagined defence or in ravenous hunger; when it does, it is a formidable brute indeed. Along the flowing road, where the forests are alive with many varieties of the rat genus and the streams run with fish, the jaguar seldom goes hungry. His usual haunts are not far from streams where he catches fish—scooping them out of the water with lightning strokes of his alert, powerful fore paw—often turtles, and once in a while the tapir, one of the shyest animals in the South American forest and a very strong and swift swimmer. Later I shall further pursue this jaguar subject; suffice to say here, that getting one in this part of South America is entirely a matter of chance meeting, and being equipped to act promptly and efficiently. It was in this manner I secured five of my trophies and without a charge, save when I found a pair and only wounded at the first shot.

When I had thrown the fair-sized and clearly marked pelt of the caño trophy over the toldo, we re-embarked and started along at a lively clip, the Indians in extra good-humour, whether because of one less jaguar at large to stir their superstitious frenzy, or merely that they were an uncommonly even-tempered lot. The spirit of the moment moved me, too, for I also was light-hearted because thus far we had progressed unimpeded, and in another day or so, if my figuring was not too much at fault, we ought to be

Digitized by Google

emerging upon the Casiquiare. So with the Indians expressing their hilarity in a series of fancy-beat strokes, with which I tried, unsuccessfully more often than not, to keep time—efforts that amused them so they laughed and postured like a lot of children—we went along in a regular frolic of paddling; which is always well in a long-journey canoe, especially toward the dragging days at the end, for it relieves the monotonous drudgery, even if it does add the labour of bailing the canoe. Besides, it puts heart in the men —more to be desired than food in the stomach, and always harder to acquire.

There was little or no change in appearance of the country through which we passed. The caño banks seemed a smaller edition of the river, minus the big trees and much of the parasitic growth, although there were spots as rank as on any river—and always, of course, we had with us the palm tree and the palm-like plants. We appeared to be going through a flat-tish country, but with no opportunity, on account of this growth alongside, to learn much else of its character; and as I was using it merely as a means to more quickly reach my goal, and not interested in its physical peculiarities, I spared none of our working hours for inspection.

The fourth day our traverse began with a burning sun that drove us to cover our bare shoulders for the first time during the otherwise wet crossing, but early afternoon again opened the heavenly flood-gates as we dug along unmindful of aught save holding our pace to three miles the hour and increasing when we could. Thus plodding as night drew near, bringing no evidence of the Casiquiare, so far as I had dis-

Digitized by Google

covered in my periodic searchings of the rain-streaked atmosphere; lo! we emerged upon a brown-yellow sea. And maybe I sat up to take notice! Had we, by some magic short cut, come into the Orinoco? If not, what then was this swelling river? Not the Negro certainly; the colour answered that. Surely this strong-flowing stream, a full one thousand feet wide where we saw it first, with heavily forested banks, could not be the Casiquiare—the canal, the merely larger-dimension caño I had pictured as the link connecting the Orinoco and the Rio Negro rivers, which Father Roman, the faithful and the brave, was the first white man to ascend in 1744. But such is just what it was; and the joy of successful venture was quite subordinated to the amazement with which I viewed the scene so different to the one of my fancy.

In all my wilderness experience I recollect no surprise equal to this first look at the Casiquiare. I could not reconcile the fiction of my imagination with the broad-bodied and swirling tide which took hold of our canoe with a vicious determination to carry it off down-stream. That is to say, I questioned if we were really on the Casiquiare—until the insects discovered us; then forthwith I was assured, for there is only one such pest-hole known to man.

If I wrote at length, frankly, of the insects of the Casiquiare as we found them during our four days' voyage to the Orinoco, you would no doubt think me to be over-drawing. I have been in some places greatly favoured by the insect hordes—Siam, Malaya, North Argentine swamp-land—but never have I encountered such throngs as on the Casiquiare. There was cessation neither by day nor by night. They

Digitized by Google

came in voracious relays; the day shifts tilled what the night hordes furrowed and fertilized. To the height of six or eight feet above the water they formed a literal cloud, denser at the river-bank by the bushes, where we had to travel close in to escape the force of the current. "Dope?" Oh yes; that's a pleasant figment of the quasi-wilderness traveller which may repel black flies and other cadets of the insect army, but to the serried ranks of these grim and bloodthirsty campaigners it is as nectar before the votaries of Lucullus. We carried no dope; the Indians knew better, and already I had learned its uselessness in other distant and less afflicted districts of the flowing road.

The only recourse is to bathe your swollen and lacerated face, neck, and hands with a bi-chloride solution made from the easily carried tablets, not as a relief measure, but as a prevention against poisoning. And if you would go safely and with least discomfort, you must not scratch; you simply must not, despite the madness of the itching—and such madness it is! The danger signal in tropical travel is the broken skin, the wound open to the multitude of stinging and poisonous creatures. Put your hands in thick gloves—bags, if necessary—but don't make of your misery a distress well-nigh unendurable, by fanning to consuming flame the fiery fluid deposited under your skin by the native "mosquito," which is not the mosquito you know, but a tiny fly-like thing possessing incredible activity and a virulence of attack unequalled by winged insects the world over.

Parenthetically, I wish to say, because I have heard the contrary contended, that the Indians had

Digitized by Google

to sustain their share of suffering; not so much as I, for naturally their skin, always exposed when the sun is lenient, toughens, as do the always unconfined feet, but yet enough to give them great trouble. Often I have seen ugly scars on native arms and legs where the eggs of a vicious woodtick species common to all South America, or of a winged borer of the Orinoco-Casiquiare region, have arrived to fruition. The insects of this land accord no immunity whether the skin of the wayfarer be light or dark.

We made long days of our flight to the Orinoco, journeying from before dawn until long after dark, stopping for rest and alleged sleep as infrequently as nature would permit, because whether in the canoe, under the bushes, or on the closely grown bank, the battle with the insects raged unceasingly. As we ascended, the heavily wooded banks became higher; at low water they would in places be accounted big banks for South America, where low ones predominate. With a current of at least four miles always against us, once in a while we came to rapid water that doubtless becomes formidable in season. But we did not see a soul during the four days it took us to reach the head of the Casiquiare (I concluded we had entered midway of its length, and praised Allah for having escaped the other half). Yet it is said, difficult to believe as it may be for one who has been there, that in the latter part of the eighteenth century quite a number of settlers lived on the banks of this river. If any stray settler lives there now, at least in the upper half, he must be buried in the consuming jungle, for we came to no visible habitation by day, or saw any light as we paddled at night, as we did

Digitized by Google

usually until ten or eleven o'clock. I did see, however, a few comparatively open spots, set off by palms, but who, one is driven to marvel, would live on the Casiquiare if he could keep body and soul together in any other place on earth!

None of us was too happy as we bent to the heavy paddle work under the plentiful rain, and every now and again the patrón's solemn, even voice, like the chant of a priest, broke the silence in single, directing words to the crew. He was a serious-minded, diligent person, was this patrón, who squatted at the extreme stern on a six-by-twelve-inch extension over the water, where he handled dexterously a blade twice the size of the others, alternately steering and lifting the canoe forward with several successive, prodigious strokes that made our straining efforts mere dabbling by comparison.

The ways of these men, less touched by civilization than any crew I had on the road, interested me greatly. Yet how much alike are the different species of the human family! In Siam and in Malaya my men built crude little altars in the jungle upon which to lay a bit of fruit, a flower, a piece of their costume, when they wanted to propitiate the gods for protection against the fever of some malodorous spot, or against "the animal," as always the terrible tiger is called. In the far north, when all but famished, we snow-shoed wearily back from the Barren Grounds, old Beniah, leader of my company of Dog-Rib Indians, was wont to invite a fair wind by throwing pinches of the treasured tobacco into the air with muttered invocation. At the other end of the world, here on the Casiquiare, my men had a rather literal

Digitized by Google

manner of casting their bread upon the waters by throwing a handful of mandioca over the side of the canoe, or a piece of shirt, always accompanied by much palaver.

All things, even the most disagreeable, reach an end, and so there came the finish to our toiling up the Casiquiare when we turned east from its miserable confines into the Orinoco, under the shadow of Duida —the seven thousand foot lookout of the range which impinges on the upper Orinoco from its source to the rock barriers at Maipures. I have been favoured with few more impressive sights, indeed, than that which greets northern escape from the Casiquiare. In the background loom mountains, several apparently separate ranges of them—a welcome change from the everlasting forest!—Almost in front of you is Duida, one-time jack-o'-lantern to the fabled El Dorado. Entering the Orinoco, the south bank in either direction is flat, but a short way to the east rises another of the rock pinnacles. Near this we camped that night of our fourth day since entering the Casiquiare and eight since leaving the Guainia, and slept delivered from the insects, which, though numerous, were as nothing to what we had just left.

In the morning, two hours' paddling took us to the one-time flourishing but now deserted mission of Esmeralda.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER X

ON THE THRESHOLD OF THE MYSTIC LAND

So this was Lope de Aguiarres' gateway to El Dorado! the phantom land which lured the Conquistadores to those marvellous voyages that gave the world its first slight knowledge of north South America interior. Here from the Amazon he had come after months of unending tribulation and toil, looking for the precious storehouse tradition declared to be guarded by one-eyed men and fighting women—a New World mating of Cyclops and Amazons. Here, too, on the line dividing the Amazon and the Orinoco basins at the base of stern Duida, let us, before taking up our journey, contemplate the swift-flowing road he searched.

Starting in the Parima Sierras to the west of the Guianas, it races northwest for about three hundred miles,* when, turning abruptly, it runs six hundred miles almost due north before heading straight east toward the Atlantic. Throughout its length of about sixteen hundred miles it drains all of Venezuela and the larger part of eastern Colombia. Receiving on its left (west) bank, rivers great in themselves, like the Guaviare and the Meta from the very foot of the Cordilleras, and the Apure, which, together with its tributaries, irrigates northwestern Venezuela as the veins

* In the absence of official figures all these distances are the estimates of a traveller without instruments for authentic reckoning.

Digitized by Google

of a hand; while on the right bank enter from the east the Ventuario, from the south the Caura and the Caroni that rise in the Parima and Pacaraima ranges —those disconnected and many-named mountains extending quite across this timbered fastness of which Duida and Roraima are respectively the western and the eastern outposts.

All the lower Orinoco, from the sea to Atures, about seven hundred and eighty miles, is open to tourist travel. By one of the several channels of its wide-open mouth excellent steamers ply regularly between Trinidad and Ciudad Bolívar, two hundred and forty miles up on the right bank; the Meta affords a comfortable launch route to within sixty miles of Bogotá, Colombia; the Apure in season is navigable for steamboats to its chief town, San Fernando, and practically the year round for launches throughout its innumerable ramifications; the lower stretches of the Caura and Caroni are easy going for canoe or launch, but are blocked by rapids and rocks in their upper sections, as the plucky Andre discovered on the Caura nearly at the cost of his life. Yet it is by these rivers —the Caura and Caroni—that the Caribs in the days of their dominance used to ascend into the great plateau to the south and thence to the Orinoco *via* the Ventuario, and even to the head of the Branco (affluent of the Negro) *via* the Parima.

Atures, just south of the Meta, where the insect pest really begins, is the northern front of the forty miles of cataracts and rocks, which, ending at Maipures, present an effectual block to navigation and divide the lower from the upper Orinoco. Of this up-river region the Guaviare and the Ventuario are

Digitized by Google

the largest and least known, each coursing through unexplored and uninhabited country—though save of the one main-travelled road the same may be said, indeed, of all streams in this region.

Above the Casiquiare, where the mountains loom in the background, a number of rivers enter the Orinoco from the north; the Padamo a couple of days beyond Esmeralda; the Ocamo a little farther east; and the Manaviche still another day's travel. Of these Padamo is the largest, being at least two hundred feet wide at the mouth when I crossed it. As far as the more broken Geheta region on the other and south bank, the country is forested though flat, except for the rock mount just east of the Casiquiare and a group of them about opposite the Manaviche River; beyond, the rough country draws nearer both banks.

To the Manaviche River the Orinoco averages in width about a half-mile and the tributary streams come in mostly on the right or north bank; but above the Manaviche it becomes more circuitous, narrower by as much as half in places, the current increases while the mountains continue on the north, and several fairish streams enter from the south. Approaching the Geheta River, about thirty miles farther up, both banks contribute many little streams; the waters are much swifter, broken with rocks and rapids, and the going becomes increasingly difficult until you reach the rock barrier about four hundred miles from Maipures, which separates the known from the unknown and resolutely disputes your way. Here is a cataract which may, no doubt, be negotiated when the river is at its highest, but which I found so for-

Digitized by Google

midable as to necessitate hauling the canoe around it. At lowest water it must present well-nigh a solid wall of rock, or a succession of cataracts, which, though increasing in rapidity as the river rises, doubtless offer less menace to navigation.

Even if not the gateway Lope the Wanderer sought, here is the very portal to an enchanted area, for although the illusion of El Dorado is dispelled, fable and mystery still enshroud this head-water country of the Orinoco, which begins at this natural entrance about six days' voyaging and some one hundred and twenty miles or thereabouts southeast of Esmeralda. To this point no insurmountable difficulty to travel offers—at least, not in May; beyond, however, is the *terra incognita*. One hears fearsome tales of this region from Brazilian to Venezuelan end of the flowing road, and no Indian will enter it because of the vengefulness these interior people are said to nourish against everybody since an eighteenth-century brutal onslaught they suffered at the hands of an invading Spanish commander. The subsequent killing from ambush of venturesome native rubber explorers on two widely separated occasions strengthened the general impression and terror.

To get beyond this barrier and have a look at the savages was the sole object of my trip to the upper waters of the Orinoco.

Esmeralda, once the prospering end of the Spaniards' known world in South America, we found to be a dismal place, now practically abandoned to the transient occupation of wayfarers like ourselves. It is situated on the least attractive site to be found under Duida, which, because of a report that it contained

Digitized by Google

gold, is really responsible for the original establishment of the mission. Heaven only knows why the founders did not locate upon the plain reaching back from the river, where the air is fresher and the insects fewer. But even at its worst, it was a delight after our recent experience, and we made a quite comfortable camp near three Maquiritare Indians, whom we found already lodged on our arrival, while I fell to speculating on the chances of inducing my crew to continue up river.

Of my cherished intention to go beyond the Geheta I had said nothing in parleying with them at Maroa and Javita—for two excellent reasons: first, because I could not voice that much lingo they would understand, and second, I knew full well they would not start at all if aware of my ambition. I had, therefore, named Esmeralda as my destination, with which all Indians are acquainted, for it, too, at one time was a centre of canoe-building. I was jubilant in securing men to go so far—it was more than I had been able to do on a previous endeavour—and well satisfied to let the question and means of going farther rest for the time being. Nor did I hurry to the subject now we had arrived.

After an afternoon of loafing, eating and smoking, I made a casual approach, saying I was going up-river on the morrow. The patrón, to whom I addressed myself, did not at once comprehend, but when he did understand he spared no time or emphasis in declaring he would not go—which, of course, included crew and canoe. Nothing I could say, nothing I could offer from the equipment so much admired by them, made the smallest impression; argu-

Digitized by Google

ment, gifts, were equally futile. They were not in the slightest degree swerved from their intention at any period of the discussion. I say "discussion" for lack of a more descriptive word. Really of discussion there was none. The seance might better be likened to a mute sign show with detached Spanish words uttered earnestly and frequently on my part, while on the part of the patrón a disheartening and monotonous "No" or shaking of the head, accompanied by a subdued and concerted hum of approval on the part of the Indians around us. There was no mistaking their feeling about the up-river district—yet I did not relax in my efforts to change their decision until we put up in our hammocks for the night.

In the morning my late crew and the canoe were missing. They had unslung their hammocks during the night and set off for home, as the quickest and surest method of disposing of the issue between us. Yet all they took away with them of mine were the sack of mandioca and the bundle of dried fish, which, together with some presents already given, constituted the agreed wage for taking me to Esmeralda. Notwithstanding my plight, I could not resist acclaiming their simple honesty.

My predicament was no more than I had half expected, though the first shock of it was somewhat disconcerting. Not that desertion much worried so old a hand in wilderness travel, but the thought of being thus put near to a possible second failure gave me a chill or two, I confess, for at the moment there seemed no other people left on earth with me but my camp neighbours. The Maquiritares, I felt certain, would not listen to any suggested exploration beyond

Digitized by Google

their ken; for, though members of this tribe oftener than any other are encountered on this bit of the Orinoco, yet they do not go far above the Padamo, up which to some extent they are in residence. Very few Indians of any tribe get more than a couple of days beyond Esmeralda, and then for only a fleeting visit; I did not see a permanent habitation on the upper waters after I had separated from the Maquiritares.

My neighbours seemed unsurprised at the disappearance of my Indians—not unlikely they knew of it before my discovery. When I sought to communicate with them they received me as though to be left high and dry without a canoe on the bank of the river one thousand miles from nowhere were an every-day happening. A meal being the first aid to reciprocity with an Indian, I spread the best of my larder and invited their attention. As we ate in silence my brain worked overtime devising ways and means, for I knew if I failed to interest them in some proposal, they would as likely as not move off without me, in which event I should be marooned for a certainty.

My best course, indeed the only course open except sitting down to await other stray Indians, seemed that of attaching myself to these Maquiritares, wherever their up-river journey took them, abiding my time and developing my plan according to opportunity. It was most important of all that I get a canoe, for without one I was as a waif in a land where none has to spare and every home is roofless. I decided, therefore, to dissemble, to say nothing about going beyond the Barrier, to let them think that with loss of my crew I had dismissed such adventuring, and was now just a traveller like themselves who

Digitized by Google

wanted a canoe and was willing to pay well for one. Giving them tobacco for cigarettes and filling my pipe, we smoked, exchanging with difficulty a few comments on the meal or the insects. Not a hint did they get that loss of my means of travel was of any more concern to me than it appeared to be to them. Before we slept in our hammocks, however, I learned they were going "one sleep" up-river at "sun up," as they expressed it, and would take me with them.

I had won the first redoubt, and you can picture my happiness and relief; luckily for my assumed indifference, the night concealed the elation which must have shown in my countenance, try as I might to suppress it.

At the close of the next day, near the mouth of a little river coming in from the north, called Gaupo, and the end, by the way, of Humboldt's up-Orinoco journey, we camped with five other Indians, two of whom had ears pierced near the top. By their complexion and ready converse with my companion I judged all the strangers to be Maquiritares save a much darker, heavier featured one who looked like a Zambo, as they call the Indian-Negro mixture in Venezuela. And at the night meal I was cheered as though by the unexpected appearance of an old friend when he addressed me in Spanish. For the first time in weeks I was able to abandon the manual wig-wagging which had been my chief means of communication and to embark upon an entire sentence in jungle Spanish; to understand and to make myself understood—almost to chatter. It was great joy.

From him I learned that my Indians were going up several of the nearby small rivers rubber hunting,

Digitized by Google

while the others were seeking herbs; that the Maquiritares live in small, scattered groups along the Orinoco between Atabapo and about where we were camped; that a few "Indios blancos" (white Indians) live up small tributaries on both sides of the river hereabouts; that all the upper Orinoco is "muy malo," where it rains most of the time and nobody lives and the insects feast upon the few who now and then voyage above San Fernando de Atabapo—the end of habitation on the river; and, finally, that no one ever goes far up the Orinoco because the "Indios bravos" (savage Indians) will "kill them." A lot more to the discredit of the up-country the Zambo told me to unmistakably prove that he shared the common aversion to the upper Orinoco.

As for myself, I too was an Indian by nature, I told him, a genuine "Indio blanco" kept from his native spirit heath by force of circumstance, and who made hunting the excuse of returning now and again to his own. I did not, however, say anything of my immediate desires, except that I wished to buy a small canoe, which he forthwith gratified by arranging with his companions to sell me the small one of their fleet of two. No doubt they discussed among themselves my deserted condition, but nothing of their speculations reached my ears.

In the morning, as things seemed to be coming my way, I determined to venture upon the next step, evolved as I lay in my hammock after the evening talk with the Venezuelan. This, in a word, was to engage his services for a "short trip" and trust to the irresistible lure of the gold sovereigns I carried to hold him when finally we got as far up-river as nor-

Digitized by Google

BOULDERS IN THE UPPER ORINOCO

A WOMAN OF THE GUAINIA

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

mally he would go. The intention of the Indians to tarry on this little river gave me excellent reason for planning to go on, and my scheme worked very nicely, especially as the Venezuelan appeared not much in sympathy with their purpose—whatever it may have been. In fact, to borrow the expressive word of the country, he was not " simpatico "; 'twas my notice of that which first gave birth to my scheme.

Among wandering people with whom life is a constant series of comings and goings, slight heed is given to arrivals or leave-takings, so we got our stuff together without comment and set out upon our journey up-stream with the Venezuelan at the bow and I in the stern of my newly acquired canoe, which was about fifteen feet long and unusually deep for its length—an excellent quality for my purpose. Sending it along at a good pace, notwithstanding the current, I was particularly pleased with my first paddle of sassafras—a durable, yellow wood, which glistens when wet as though shellaced. The " crew " informed me that during the time of Esmeralda's prosperity canoes were made there of this wood, and that paddles are now and again fashioned of it by the Maquiritares, who, however, appear to prefer the decorated, darker, heavier ones of the lower river. Through subsequent vicissitudes of the flowing road, down to the present day, I have retained possession of that tough and good looking paddle.

On the second day after starting we passed the Padamo, and in another day and a half came to the Ocamo, the river on which live, so the Zambo said, the reputed white Indians, about whom so much imaginary is uttered—none more ridiculous than that their

Digitized by Google

lighter complexion is due to the visitations of Dutch traders from Guiana a century or two ago. I have never been able to learn that traders crossed into this country—the chances are ninety-nine out of one hundred they never did—but to assume that a few stragglers could lighten the skin of an entire tribe is crediting the Dutch with industry and prepotency unrivalled in the history of man. If these are the "Indios blancos" of scientist tract and traveller's yarn at Rio Janeiro and Caracas, Manaos and Bolívar, they are variously set down as of the Guaycas, the Guainares and the Guaharibos families. Probably, they really belong to the Guaharibos, which seems to comprise practically all the Indians south of the Orinoco between the Meta and the Guaviare rivers.

Their complexion is certainly the lightest on the Road—a bleached copper, I should call it. Those I saw were taller and better looking than the average Indian of the country, and friendly and honest so far as my experience goes. In small collections of palm thatched houses they live up tributaries within a day or two's travel east of Esmeralda, but I found only a wandering few individuals on the Orinoco itself. They are famous brewers of the curare poison, for which, it is maintained, no antidote is known, and with which arrows and darts are charged.

I have no first-hand evidence of its powers, but competent experimenters with examples fetched to the outside world have given trustworthy results that leave no doubt of its deadly power. A big bird, such as the curassow, succumbs in a couple of minutes, while the largest members of the rat family and the peccary yield in ten; a drop in a mere pin prick is

Digitized by Google

claimed to be fatal to man. The formula of this poison is a zealously kept secret, and the making is attended by much ceremony in guarded seclusion. Outside knowledge is confined to such general information as that it is made from an herb found up the small rivers flowing into the Orinoco, and macerated, stewed and strained until finally drawn off to be kept in hollow sections of cane. The fibre strung bows used by these Indians are very stiff, from four to six feet in length, and the arrows are tipped with bone and hard wood; their blow-gun * "sarabatana" is a small, straight, hollow reed about seven feet long, fitted inside of a bamboo or palm sapling, which makes a firm, stout sheath; the darts are slivers of hard wood with wool-like butt made of inner tree bark. The blow-gun secures small animals and birds, while fish are killed with bow and arrow, which also serve for larger game, like the tapir.

It was still a big river, this Orinoco, but after another two days its breadth diminished considerably; meanwhile, as anything interesting offered, I made it the opportunity for a halt and a smoke. We loafed along a good bit, and you may be sure I treated that Venezuelan well. Among my slender supplies nothing was too good for him. No word of destination was spoken, my thought being that the nearer we got to the Barrier before the disclosure, the easier it would be to win him; therefore, I talked only of the birds, was constantly on the outlook for new ones or

* Though credited with using, I never actually saw it in the hands of the Guaharibos. Dr. Rice reports it on the Uaupes.

Digitized by Google

for the jaguar, of which he appeared fairly well informed and less afraid than most natives I had taken with me. A rich, blackish-brown bird about the size of a dove attracted my attention by its long whistle ending in a couple of explosive notes. Once I heard several of them answering; and there was another call, a hoarse rasp followed by a very agreeable flute note, which frequently came to my ears, though I never saw the bird. But neither bird nor animal life was plentiful. Truth is, the upper Orinoco birds made slight impression upon me. At this stage I was entirely absorbed with thought of my plan which was soon to be put to test; later I was working too hard to pay heed to any life save the omnipresent insect life which at no time or place can be quite disregarded.

But two phenomena demanded recognition of the most thoroughly occupied mind. The first was the rain—Jupiter Pluvius, how it did rain, and yet rain, day and night! The oppressive humidity, the enormous plant life, the tree trunks on the north bank larger than any I saw elsewhere along the flowing road; it seemed as if we were passing through the hothouse of South America. I could actually smell the rank vegetation. And the insects were a good second in numbers and aggression to those of the Casiquiare. The other compelling feature of these days was the storms. Thunder which came peal after peal down from the mountains at the north to reverberate along our track, almost to shake our canoe it seemed; lightning that flashed at the forest edge like a meteor in dazzling, bewildering zigzags; and momentary gusts of wind, which were refreshing indeed and

Digitized by Google

a foe to the insects, but that roughed the water to a point of upset for our low craft. Thus we journeyed east with no word of my objective. At last the challenge came.

It was on the night of the fifth day and the Venezuelan had said we must turn back on the morrow as the "Indios bravos" were near. The showdown was due, and I was frank. I told him I intended going a few days beyond the Barrier to see what there was to be seen; that I wished him to go with me and would pay him handsomely—five libras—*i.e.*, twenty-five dollars—in addition to the "peso" (one native dollar) a day wage. I scoffed at the danger, declared the bad Indians a fairy-tale and assured him we should avoid them, anyway, as I proposed to travel only in the night. But he was a stiffer proposition than I expected. He declined emphatically, putting aside the five libras as though his pockets already overflowed with gold. Then I offered him ten—and again he put temptation aside, more slowly, but with apparent resolution, much to my growing dismay. In a situation less fateful, his second refusal would, no doubt, have terminated my overtures, but I was not to be deterred, just at the door of this land of mystery. To get behind that barrier was the purpose of the hardest trip of my life. A buckskin bag in my pocket held my entire capital—forty English sovereigns (two hundred dollars). Emptying its contents into my hand I divided the shiny gold coins into two equal, glittering piles, and told him one would be his if he went with me. The display appeared to fascinate him; an avaricious expression distorted his usually good-humoured coun-

Digitized by Google

tenance; and with the feeling that I had won came also a strangely repellent sensation not unmixed with anxiety because of what his face revealed.

Even after he'd agreed to go I was not sure of him until we were actually on the way. For half the night he raved, alternately declaring he would and he wouldn't, that he'd be killed by the savages if he did,—and a lot more which I did not understand. Likewise, he revealed why he so much wanted money. He was a deserter, he said, from the Venezuelan army, his name Cristobal; he had worked his way up the Orinoco, finally joining the Maquiritares, hoping to get a little rubber or herbs or seeds or something he could turn into trade and so make his way down the Casiquiare into the Negro and on to Brazil, where a Zambo is in good favour, and where he would be safe from the wrath of Castro.

After Cristobal had quieted in slumber, I stole into the canoe at the bank and, dropping down-stream about one hundred yards, remoored and slept.

I was determined that another canoe and crew should not leave me in the night.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XI

BEYOND THE BARRIER

Apparently now reconciled to his lot, Cristobal, in the morning, remonstrated no longer, though his reswung hammock had proved an eloquent telltale on my daylight return, suggesting, if it did not actually reveal, frustrated desire and at least indorsing the wisdom of my precaution in putting the canoe safely out of reach. It began to look as if both of my eyes were to be kept busy—one on my crew and the other for " Indios bravos."

As we were, according to my closest figuring, about a day or two at most from the Barrier, I decided upon making this camp our home base for the dash into the unknown, and here to cache everything not absolutely necessary. It was not a long list, for my belongings were few, comprising all clothing except what I stood in—notebook, pipe, tobacco, medicine kit, camera (which had been of little use to me at any time in the almost continuous rain), the dried fish, and coffee. In fact, everything except my revolver, rifle—with ammunition—sheath knife, field-glasses, watch, match-box, enough mandioca to last for about ten days, hammock, toothbrush, a thong of buckskin with which I am always equipped in the wilderness, and, of course, the little buckskin bag containing the gold sovereigns. I chose the mandioca instead of the fish, not that it is more sustaining, but because the hazard of a cooking fire to disclose my presence was thus

Digitized by Google

avoided; and because this native food is so easily and simply prepared. You have, as I think I have already written, only to put the meal into a gourd, the dish of the country, flip in enough river water to moisten it—and there you are! a food which tastes like a bran mash, if you've ever sampled what is excellent for your horse now and again, but one which nevertheless keeps you going. Along all the flowing road from port to port it is the basic provender.

Having put my note-book, together with camera, in a water-proof canvas bag, and bundled the remaining mandioca in a rubber poncho—heavy hot thing, useless for the real tropical rainy reason—I rolled the lot together with the coffee and sugar canisters in a small tarpaulin which had cost nearly its weight in gold at Para, and fastened it up in the tree to which Cristobal had tied his hammock the night before. Then we moved on, lighter as to bulk, and with the cheeriness gone out of the Zambo's face.

We had several false alarms before finally, on the next afternoon, a short way beyond a small stream from the south which I decided to be the Geheta, we came to a series of cataracts and rock benches and boulders extending across the river as a boundary—a barrier, *the* Barrier at last, the long sought! *

It surely looked a formidable obstruction, and at low water must present in one place practically a rock wall, the stream cascading down its centre and over one edge with force enough to turn a mill. Our

*Relying upon what he was told at Esmeralda, Humboldt apparently errs in locating these cataracts, and underestimates their distance from the Gaupo, the most easterly point he attained on the upper Orinoco.

Digitized by Google

first view gave a vista of boulders of all sizes with rapid water everywhere. It didn't look good to me for navigation, so we went as far as we could without risking an upset, and then landed at the bank. I wished very much to make a reconnaissance that I might the more intelligently choose the best way of crossing, but I did not dare leave Cristobal, lest, overwhelmed with fear at thought of being at the very entrance to the dreaded land, he might stampede with the canoe; nor in the circumstances did I want to take him and leave the canoe. I believe always in keeping your means of transportation—canoe, horse, legs—in condition and at command. So I decided to haul and pack around overland and to do so at once instead of awaiting nightfall, for I did not believe savages had been sitting on these boulders ever since they had killed rubber-seeking natives many years before, awaiting and a-thirsting for the next victim.

The honest fact is, I found myself perplexed as to just how much of common report and fear to respect. I could not help feeling that the "Indios bravos" tales were overdrawn, although the death of the two natives referred to seemed well established. At the same time, I could not ignore the general feeling of the country. The spirit of adventure ruling strong within me, I was ready and eager to take a chance, yet the idea of being potted from the densely covered bank by some one I could neither see nor get at did not commend itself as a sporting proposition, particularly as no antidote is yet known for the poison with which the darts and arrows used hereabouts are anointed. Not that the poisoned arrow route isn't preferable, if one must die, to typhoid,

Digitized by Google

for instance—I think it is; but the sting of the implied failure is sometimes more repulsive than old Death himself, and this was one of those occasions.

As a provident and an experienced wilderness traveller, I was bound to feel my way cautiously, accepting the country at its own valuation and prepared for whatever might happen. If I did not succeed in getting out, the joy of getting in would encounter a blight almost before it had opened its eyes upon the gay world. Thus debating with myself again here at the Barrier as I had done night after night since arriving on the hobgoblin threshold, I resolved to play the spy entering enemies' country—to travel by night and lay up by day. Meantime the first business in hand was to get to the other side of the Barrier with as little delay as possible.

I did not at all fear our being heard, as the noise of the river drowned any we might make and the friendly rain veiled our movements against long-range discovery. But when we had drawn the canoe well up on the bank, I attentively scanned our surroundings in every direction with my glasses, finding neither signs of human life nor evidence of a bridge of vines which the Indians are said to have constructed in the eighteenth century. Then we marched forward, mostly carrying the canoe with our dunnage inside or hauling it where possible, as walking over the rocks was at risk of stumbling and perhaps damaging our craft. And despite my belittlement of danger for the benefit of Cristobal I could not drive out the insistent thought that any moment might bring notice of our official eviction by way of twang of bow and smart of flesh. You cannot keep

Digitized by Google

your imagination from soaring under such conditions, however your deliberate judgment may deride its phantom painting. Thus alternately carrying and surveying, at dusk we floated the canoe on the other side the magic line and immediately went forward, paddling noiselessly, every sense alert, astonished to find that from first to last we had been only a little over three hours.

Once well under way, tension relaxed and gave opportunity to look around. I was surprised that at this mid-season between high and low water the width of the river above the Barrier should be over one hundred feet. Within two days, however, it contracted, becoming as narrow as seventy-five to even fifty feet for a stretch, while the shoals multiplied. Going became both slow and hazardous, for, though the rain confined its fury chiefly to the morning and afternoon, easing up at noon and during the night, the river remained dark and rock ridden. Sometimes for a space we covered distance at a fair rate, but for a great deal of the time we almost literally felt our way. We kept close to the south bank, except on a few occasions when obliged by shoals to swing out, starting as soon as it grew dark and stopping before daylight.

These were long "days" full of wearying exertion, yet I but half slept, waking at the slightest sound. Our usual laying-up place during the day was under concealing bushes at the river edge or in the dense growth back from the water; once when a rocky bank compelled it, I drew the canoe under the earth and sprawling root cover of an upturned tree. Needless to say I never rested so far away from the

Digitized by Google

canoe as not to be able to reach out and touch it with my hand. Cristobal always swung his hammock, as I insisted he should, a little distance off—from fifty to one hundred feet, according to the character of the bank. I avoided arousing his suspicion by suggesting the separation on the ground that our divided camp was safer and more vigilant—which explanation had also the advantage of being truthful. But I was keeping an eye on my Zambo—that's the truth—because, since crossing the Barrier, he had laboured so well and so sympathetically and endured the hard work and the discomforts so uncomplainingly that I mistrusted his zeal; I could not down the doubt, though I believe that at this time he was really actuated by no other motive than to make the best and the quickest of a bad job. Until we got beyond where he could in a single dash escape to the Barrier, however, I kept one hand on the canoe and rested where I could command his position.

So for five days we rested and for six nights we paddled, with no indication of man or of any of his works. But the works of the Almighty enveloped us. From across the opposite bank, the north bank, the mountains, now nearer, frowned upon us; big bodied trees raised themselves on high to accentuate the thick jungle beneath; great smooth boulders bespoke a relationship with those of the Negro; and the river took on more the nature of a mountain stream in current and shoals, though maintaining a breadth never less, as I saw it, than approximately fifty feet. The air was heated, the insects plentiful, and the rain less frequent, though when it came it was in such a downpour as if the heavens had opened

Digitized by Google

MAKING READY TO CACHE OUR BELONGINGS BEFORE CROSSING THE BARRIER

CAMPING IN LUXURY AT ESMERALDA

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

—a picture further strengthened by the outburst of thunder and lightning which often accompanied the flood. These storms were of short duration, perhaps an hour at a time, but the fury of them while they lasted was terrific. I had heard of tropical storms and I had witnessed them often during my adventuring in South American jungles, but never have I encountered any to compare with those which swept down upon us on the upper Orinoco in the early days of May, 1907.

We had completed our sixth long night's paddling, had made fast, and were eating our mandioca breakfast before composing ourselves for the day—when out of the near distance came an unmistakable human shout. Need I say it startled us? No castaway on a desert isle could have been more so. We turned amazed, inquiring faces to each other—at least, Cristobal's bore amazement, and I suspect mine did also, for though hourly we had been looking, listening for just such a sound, the coming of it on a sudden without warning, where only the river made itself heard, was strongly agitating—no less. It was a great moment, for it meant we had at least come up with some of the inhabitants of this land; but it was also an anxious moment until we had our bearings. And then we sat breathlessly awaiting a repetition that we might locate the voice, for so suddenly had it broken upon us I could not be sure whether the owner was on our side or the other side of the river. Not another shout came to relieve our suspense; though we waited minutes upon minutes, no sound reached our ears from any quarter save the singing of the river directly below us. Somebody, however, was

Digitized by Google

certainly within call, and it was up to us to find him.

Making the canoe ready for instant action and signing Cristobal to follow me, I crawled along the bank, seeking vantage ground from which I might examine our whereabouts more closely than I could from the secluded spot we had purposely selected for our day's retirement. But we had chosen our retreat too well for our present need, the bush growth on the bank being so dense that getting through it without noise was an unbelievably slow and worrisome task. Finally, we reached a point where the jungle opened so as to offer a fair view of the river and its north side. The eager first glance was unrewarded; only a jungle-covered bank such as I had been daily looking upon greeted my eyes. Deliberate scrutiny, however, uncovered a small bay-like recess where, close under the upper bank, seemingly standing on the water and not over seventy-five feet from us, was a nude Indian evidently fishing. Cristobal and I drew back on the discovery to further insure our concealment, and then securing as advantageous a view-point as possible I studied the Indian and his environment long and minutely with my glasses. Up and down the bank and back as far as I could penetrate, I searched, while Cristobal beside me crouched silent in perturbation none the less obvious because held in check. Nor was the Zambo the only excited member of this exploring party; abundant emotion stirred in me, too, at sight of the lone fisherman and the evidence he provided that my long journey was not to be unrewarded.

He was fishing with bow and arrow, after the manner common to all the flowing road country,

Digitized by Google

standing on what appeared to be a log manœuvred along the recessed bank by a boy squatting astern. Thrice he shot, each time securing a fish and recovering his arrow—the only one he appeared to have—and not once did he shift his position. Indeed, the two resembled bronze images graven against the darker forest background. The man held his bow in readiness at thigh with eyes riveted upon the water, and the boy manipulated his crude paddle so gently you scarce could detect its movement. Small wonder we had not seen them at the first hurried glance. He was slender and tall, darker than the Maquiritares, who are rather lighter than the Indians of the lower river; and, contrary to custom prevailing on both the Orinoco and the Negro rivers, his hair was long. I had not before in South America seen Indians thus wearing their hair, although told that such is the habit of the savages. So far as hair evidence went we seemed to have fallen among the " Indios bravos " sure enough.

Save for a narrow ribbon of vine or fibre of some kind tightly circling his waist just above the hips he was without ornament or covering. As long as the fisherman remained in sight, which was perhaps for half an hour or less, I kept my glasses on him, giving little heed to exploration of the bank behind; but when he had gone, quietly disappearing at the lower and inside end of the recess, I gave all my attention to the bank where he had vanished. So sudden had the picture come and gone, so quiet, it scarce seemed of the realities—yet, Cristobal there at my side, wide-eyed and serious, gave it tangibility.

Digitized by Google

The jungle opposite, which had swallowed our Indian, appeared to differ not at all from that of the usual heavily forested and densely bushed bank I had learned to know so well. No opening relieved the shadow except where he had disappeared. Here showed a definite break extending as far back as I could see, where individual trees appeared to stand out from the jumble of undergrowth and swaying vines; while at the water's edge the brush thinned, so a low bank was visible. Cristobal ascended a near-by tree in an attempt to descry more, but he could add nothing to my meagre knowledge. Thus I spent the entire morning, learning as much as could be gained through first-class field-glasses, detailing in undertone to Cristobal such information as would help him the more intelligently to coöperate with me. We each carried a mental photograph of that opposite bank when, toward mid-afternoon, we returned to our interrupted and still unfinished breakfast, in the jungle back of the canoe.

There was no sleep in camp that day, neither for me nor for Cristobal, who seemed to have become less affrighted and more interested; twice he went up a tree, once taking my glasses—which he said were not so good as his own eyes—but saw nothing, and not again did we hear a sound from across the river. As night drew on I slowly and carefully laid my plans before the Zambo, picking the simplest Spanish in my vocabulary, and reiterating such details as depended upon his coöperation.

Only one way of seeing these Guaharibos people at short range was possible in the circumstance—viz., to sneak among them. Of course, there was the open

Digitized by Google

way of approaching with beads in hand, but I had no beads, nor a crew that would thus convey me, nor, in such handicapped condition, the wish to test either the verity of common report as to their blood-thirstiness or the potency of their curare poison. I told Cristobal that as soon as night fell we'd paddle up-stream half a mile, cross to the other bank and drop down half the distance, where I would land and endeavour to make my way thence to some point of observation from which I could get a near view of the savages; that my action on shore would be governed by conditions as I found them; that he was to immediately return to camp over the same course we had come and follow it again at dark next night, to where he left me. When he asked what he should do if I failed to meet him at the given time and place, I told him with a show of confidence there was no such probability; I might be delayed a little, but I was certain to arrive. And with great earnestness I warned him to carry out my instructions to the letter, for on his so doing depended not only my life, but his as well.

He did not like the idea of being left and wanted to go with me on shore, protesting vigorously against returning with the canoe. I pointed out the greater safety for us both in my outlined scheme; that one was much the less likely of discovery than two, and that loss of the canoe would be as serious as loss of life. Notwithstanding my logic, the project was obviously not to his liking and he sulked. Whereupon I told him very plainly and with much emphasis that if he wished to reach Brazil instead of the Venezuelan prison his one way was to earn the money I had

Digitized by Google

promised him; and that was possible only by obeying my instructions promptly without deviation.

With all preparations made and plans decided, nothing remained but the coming of night for their execution, and as darkness began its sudden descent I gave the final touch to my personal equipment so I might step out of the canoe at ready. Most of the time I had been barefooted in the canoe, as I have already explained, for three good reasons: (1) always these low dugouts ship water, so there is two or three inches continuously in the bottom; (2) shoes are a hinderance to moving around in such a craft; and (3) one is so often going overboard in a day's journey, handling the canoe around points of rapid water or over rocks, that it saves the time of putting on and off shoes.

For this island adventure, however, I put on shoes, the high canvas lace kind I use in the tropics, because I knew my feet were not tough enough for the going and might betray me, I feared, into some sudden noise-making motion at a time when soundless walking was imperative. For the same reason I cut off my khaki trousers at just below the knee, so there would be no surplus to scrape against the brush. A gray flannel shirt and a silk handkerchief of the bandanna pattern around my neck concluded my attire. I wore no hat, and when I had need to keep my long hair from falling over my eyes I bound it Indian fashion with the kerchief. Such headgear is my habit, in fact, in all interior jungle travel; a hat or cap affords no protection, is constantly being snatched off the head, and therefore a nuisance. Only on the river and in

Digitized by Google

the sun did I ever wear one. In addition to my usual light trousers belt, I wore another and a heavier one on which hung my knife and revolver; around my neck I carried the little buckskin bag with its precious contents; in my pocket some cartridges.

Thus, in marching trim with every one of our few articles of equipment in place, and all compact and portable, we launched our canoe for my first attempt to approach the family circles, so to say, of the "Indios bravos."

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XII

AMONG THE INDIOS BRAVOS

Fortune prospered my enterprise by providing a clear night to help us pick our way silently. For a half-mile or a little more, we paddled up-stream, keeping under cover of the bank as much as was possible and crossing to the other side quietly with some difficulty on account of the current and the rocks. When we had dropped down about a quarter of a mile, following every turn of the shore the better to secure protection of its bushes, we halted at a small opening, where I landed for the preliminary survey which decided me to make this my base of operations. Cristobal again begged to be allowed to accompany me, but I promptly made him understand the discussion of that subject was closed. Taking the mandioca sack out of the canoe and handing him a half-day's ration, I repeated my instructions for him to go back over our route, following it again without deviation when he came to this spot the next night—and bade him start.

He went reluctantly enough, and with him went my connection with the outside; should he not return my position would certainly be precarious. Of course, I realized the chance I was taking—that's the sport of adventuring—but it was not so long a chance as to make the odds too heavy against me. I had watched the man very attentively and felt he would stick, not on account of loyalty—I didn't believe he had a spark of it—but on purely selfish grounds. I

Digitized by Google

held the key to the situation—two keys, indeed, the gold and the mandioca. I knew he was terrified by the trip and had come for the sole reason of getting those shining sovereigns which were to take him to liberty; it was not likely he would now run away from these, however much he recoiled at the price of service. Moreover, even if his fright overcame his cupidity, there remained the question of food. We were a long way from any habitation or the likelihood of meeting a travelling Indian on the river from whom food might be procured—too far for provisionless flight; and all he had was the scant ration I had purposely provided—a single meal in the small calabash. So the odds were in my favour, I thought. Having one or the other of the keys, he might have put me to the necessity of discovering if these " Indios bravos " merit their reputation; but with neither gold nor food—well, as I cached the sack by hanging it on an inland hidden tree, I felt rather sure that if Cristobal did not have another handful out of it the next night it would be through my failure, not his, to keep the rendezvous.

For a full half-hour after the Zambo had gone, I studied the shadows of the forest over which the starlight twinkled with slight effect; and when my eyes saw independent of my imagination in the weird light, I began my furtive approach upon the recessed bank where the Indian had fished in the morning and which I intended to make the pivot of my explorations inland. Ready now for action, I adjusted my equipment according to habit. To facilitate noiseless, unhampered movement, I slipped my rifle strap over the left and under the right shoulder, so it car-

Digitized by Google

ried firmly on my back, butt upmost; my glasses were slung so as to seat securely under the left arm pit; my revolver and knife I slipped to the front of my belt, one on either side, right and left. Thus I knew by experience I had everything under body control in worming through brush, with nothing at my sides to need watching or to catch; and my hands free.

The section I entered was more open than it appeared to be from the river, often the case when concealing bushes of the bank give no hint of comparative clearings behind. Yet one unaccustomed to jungle would hardly have called it open going, for of plant and bush life there was abundance and too many bore thorns for careless or painless walking; many were the times I wished for those discarded trouser lengths!

I came to the little bay much sooner than I expected—the current had been swifter than our calculations—but no one was there or any evidence of habitation or canoe. Circling, I found what in such setting might be described as a path, which showed no great usage and was barely discernible. Following this with utmost caution, I passed through the denser jungle edging of the river into more open forest, and in less than a mile into a small savannah with a group of the familiar, smooth-looking boulders at the near side. Turning my steps towards these, with a view to using them for a lookout point, I was of a sudden halted with a rising pulse, by voices—several voices!

Stealing a dozen paces nearer and to one side, I crouched in my tracks listening. Evidently it was an

Digitized by Google

abode, or at least an encampment, the voices always from the same direction—not over fifty to sixty feet away; I could hear them distinctly. Even more distinctly I could hear my heart thumping, which calmed as it recovered from the abrupt arrival of the novel situation. The talking continued—now desultory, now flaring up in a sustained flow, always modulated, but never tuneful. There seemed to be three or four men and a woman, and I concluded them fixed for the night, as they gave no signs of shifting. It was not late—I guessed not over nine, though I could not read my watch dial and, of course, would not strike a match. I remained where I had crouched long after the last voice had subsided, and then retreating as I had come—there being no fear of leaving tracks in such cover—I reached the edge of the savannah again.

Recalling Cristobal's tree lookout of the day before, I determined to try the same method in an attempt to see something of these people. But the idea came easier than its execution. Trees were not wanting, but either they were festooned with innumerable vines, making climbing next to impossible, or they presented sixty feet of smooth, clear trunk of too great circumference, or one so covered with parasitic growth as to effectually block ascent. Sidling thus cautiously in my inspection from tree to tree, on a sudden I was rooted to the spot by a crashing at my side—while visions of a whole tribe of implacable cannibals flashed before me—and almost as instantly I recognized the quick rustling and the clacking of peccaries. Nor was recognition of the

Digitized by Google

true intruder much relief. Nothing on four feet is more pugnacious for its inches than these same little brutes; already they had put me up a tree in Brazil after I had killed four of a herd. Luckily, this was a small company, and with the tree as a shield I remained undiscovered while they busied round a few moments before passing on.

At last, after being stopped midway up one tree by the hanging-garden parasite, I finally ascended about forty feet of a gray, slim, unencumbered trunk after the hardest bit of shinning I had ever experienced. Being just back of the first trees at the savannah's edge it commanded an entire view of the boulders which showed indistinctly about one hundred and fifty to two hundred feet off. I made myself as comfortable as I could, which, because of the frequency of the limbs, was more comfortable than I had expected. Straddling two close-growing ones, to which I secured the rifle, with one arm over another, and my back against the trunk, I passed the buckskin thong around the tree and my body under the arms, fastening it at my breast. Thus I awaited daylight, getting several quite respectable cat naps, as the conditions for dozing, although somewhat unconventional, were but little less comfortable than in the canoe.

Three men, a woman, and some children made up the party camped among the boulders, and it did not take long to record their points of interests. Like the fisherman, who was not among them, they were taller and slimmer and darker than the average of Indians I had met on the river having no negro blood. Yet there were no negroid characteristics; their noses were neither broad nor flat—less inclined

Digitized by Google

that way, indeed, than many of lighter hue along the road; their hair was long and coarse; they were nude save for girdles of fibre, or something like it, which afforded no concealment except partially in the case of the woman, and were probably not worn for such purpose. Of ornaments they bore very few; the woman had a necklace of either beans or small teeth—like monkey teeth; and one of the men wore a neck ring which appeared to be of vine. None had ear pendants or nose rings, and there was less of the pot-belly conformation so usual to interior people of South America because of the coarse and innutritious food they consume in great quantities.

Not until I had been watching them all morning did it suddenly dawn upon me that they had no fire or had made one at any time. Yet they had eaten, were eating indeed, when I awoke to the absence of any cooking agency. The men busied themselves, one making a bow, another scraping a bit of wood with something seemingly stone, as near as I could judge, while the third made a jaunt into the forest beyond the savannah, bringing back a bird which the woman threw behind her into what looked like a hole in the ground or the rocks. They ate fish and something vegetable I did not recognize which they picked up and bit as one might an apple. But at no time was there indication of fire, and of utensils I saw only gourds and one larger vessel resembling a shallow, earthen bowl. Fingers were the only forks and spoons, and either a sliver of hard wood or bone served as a knife.

It rained in the afternoon, and they all disappeared among the rocks, but just where and how I

Digitized by Google

could not see, so I decided to hunt another tree from which I could overlook that part of their camp. Until dark, therefore, I occupied myself locating such a one and speculating on these humans who appeared to live in the ground and eat without fire.

On attempting to descend, I discovered I was quite a bit stiffened, but a little muscle flexing soon smoothed the machinery, and I found my way without accident or incident to the place of rendezvous. Sure enough, there was Cristobal waiting. He greeted me as a dear, returning friend, and lost no time in preparing the mandioca I had fetched from the cached sack; in which repast I joined him with gusto, for small as his ration, mine had been even smaller. I had taken none, the necessary water not being accessible aloft.

Cristobal was full of wonderment, but could throw no light on what I had seen; he had always heard these savages lived "como perro" (like dogs) without fixed houses; as to whether they used fire—no one had ever been with them to find out, he said.

The second tree lookout was almost opposite my first perch a little farther from the boulders, and put me in position to solve the disappearance of the Indians. They were in caves, of which the boulder group appeared to have several, all shallow.

This was rather a stupid day. The men went away, the woman and children remained holed. Late in the afternoon I heard a shouting across the savannah, inland way, followed shortly after by the coming of two men who fraternized with the woman until the men of the house returned, and then all six sat around eating the vegetable to which I have re-

Digitized by Google

ferred. The strangers differed in no respect from the others except that one, a young man, wore a necklace of small claws about ocelot size, with a long talon in the centre as sizable as that of an eagle.

When the visitors departed, I followed them carefully with my glasses, and as soon as night had settled, hastened to my meal with Cristobal, who did not arrive until after I had eaten. He had been delayed in starting by a man and woman and a little boy, who remained until dusk at the tiny bay, the man fishing, the woman digging into the bank at various places—getting nothing so far as Cristobal could see.

It was easy now finding my way to the savannah, and I made the detour to where I had marked down the visitors with not much difficulty—but at this point I was puzzled. Listening long, I could detect no sound. I felt sure the camps were not widely separated—that the new one, if not in a savannah, would be in the more open jungle. It had rained most of the afternoon and was doing so now, making the denser woods so black that to say I groped my way along would be fairly to describe my progress. I knew there would be no voices to either guide me or arrest me before I walked on to the strangers, but I also felt that unless I stumbled actually upon them, any small noise, if detected, would be ascribed to some animal—often, as I stole along, I heard such sounds. So I went ahead.

Passing through this close bit of forest, I came into comparative openness and decided to find a tree here, for it was too dark to survey my surroundings, and I felt I must be near the new camp. Daylight, however, revealed neither camp nor Indians. I was

Digitized by Google

at the opening of a kind of pocket dotted with groups of trees and beyond, at the end, a hill rose. I could sweep practically the entire place, but not a sound did I hear or a thing did I see indicating human life. All morning I used my glasses industriously—without reward. In disgust at my failure I had just about made up my mind to descend when the crying of a child directly at the right renewed my interest in life. I couldn't see because of intervening trees, but as the sounds were, I reckoned, several hundred feet away, I hastened to earth and toward a tree which would, I felt, overlook the sought-for camp. Yet I was again disappointed, for I could see nothing resembling Indians, and the crying had ceased before I got out of the other tree. It's no speedy performance even to come down quietly thirty to sixty feet of limbless tree trunk accoutred as I was—as to shinning up, tramping the northern muskeg in spring-time is a picnic beside it!

It seemed as if my day was destined to be a blank, when, shortly after four, I discovered one of the two visitors of yesterday coming up the pocket carrying, as I saw when he drew nearer, an agouti. He passed within one hundred feet of me and stopped at a small grove of large trees not another hundred feet away. Forthwith issued the sound of voices, then a shout, and soon whom should I see approaching from beyond but my lone fisherman. Evidently there was another camp at hand, and under cover of the early dark, before joining Cristobal, I located both with certainty and a tree from which to observe them the day following.

My fourth attempt to view the home life of these

Digitized by Google

INDIANS WEST OF LAKE MARACAIBO SHOWING STYLE OF BOW COMMON TO ALL VENEZUELA

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

homeless people began after a good half-night's dozing in a tree at the jungle edge. From this elevated position I could see both camps about two hundred and fifty feet distant, each being a very simply constructed lean-to, housing, all told, four men, three women, and several children, similar in feature and undress to the others I had seen. Bows were the only weapons in sight, while the culinary department appeared to be restricted to the gourd-like vessels; there was no fire, though I saw them eating in the early morning and at noon.

Having evidently exhausted what they had to show in the way of home life from this vantage-point, I determined on descending for some exploration on foot. Swinging to the far side of the camp and the hillside of the pocket and working up-wind, I discovered another lean-to quite open to view under a high-branched tree, occupied by two men, one oldish, the other young and wearing a neck-band strung with what looked like parrot beaks. He was vigorously grinding or polishing something between stones which now and again his companion examined. Finally, he appeared to finish the job, when, picking up his bow and slipping on an open-braided basket-like quiver, he headed for the jungle practically at where I stood.

This was disconcerting—or good luck—as you feel. I thought it a providential opportunity to see the Indian at work, so moving to one side behind a great plant, I let him pass within twenty-five feet of me; and before another fifty feet I was on his trail. He was looking for game, otherwise moving so cautiously I could not have kept within hailing distance, and as it was, the forest permitted me only occa-

Digitized by Google

sional glimpses of him. On one of these he was stringing a rat creature he had shot on a vine which he attached to his girdle.

As I followed, the wild fancy of capturing and taking him out flashed through my brain; then sober second thought queried how it was to be accomplished. I could not hold him up because a rifle meant nothing to him; he'd probably think it some new kind of blow-gun, which, together with the bow, completes his knowledge of deadly weapons. The instant I showed myself he would either lodge an arrow where it would do the most good—for him—or raise an alarm; probably both. Meantime, there'd be nothing for me but either to kill him or skip—neither of which alternatives pleased me. So I forsook the capturing alive idea and turned toward my cache, as dusk was approaching and I had strayed quite a distance.

Scarcely had I separated from the Indian when a boa constrictor, all of eight feet long, drew slowly across my path, filling me, as these unblinking reptiles always do, with resistless desire to kill. It was second largest of the few snakes I saw, but often as I stealthily crept along in the night I fancied I heard them—which was worse than seeing them. Really, you see remarkably few snakes in the jungle considering their multitude; they flee your path.

Cristobal grinned for the first time in a couple of weeks when I told him this night that the distinguished exploring expedition into the Mystic Land, under the auspices of the American with the wanderlust, had come to an end, bringing harm to none and

Digitized by Google

mighty little information of value to any one. Personally, however, I felt amply repaid for my arduous journey. To be sure, merely looking upon these savages of such ill-repute had brought me chiefly the joy of adventure and the satisfaction of finally grasping what I had struggled to reach, but for me that spelled attainment. My mission was neither punitive nor scientific nor yet humanitarian; the sole motive force behind my enterprise was the wish to "look behind the ranges"—the lust of adventure, if you prefer so to call it. Of course, I could easily have learned the real attitude of the Indians toward intruders and might even have brought out important knowledge for the savants; or, on the other hand, I might have been compelled to defend myself, and frankly I did not invite such an issue. I had no relish for being put to the necessity of waging so uneven a battle as a magazine rifle against bows and arrows or blow-guns suggested. It seemed too much like poking a stick into an ant-hill and then swatting the insects as they hurried forth.

Some day, perhaps, an adequately equipped and numbered party with interpreters will penetrate this region to gather scientific data concerning these Indians and determine, without slaughtering them, I hope, if they are as eager for human gore as now freely claimed to be. My feeling is that any attack they might make would be in supposed self-defence on account of traditional dread of intruders rather than because of bloodthirstiness. I find it indeed difficult in a retrospective view to transform any one of those groups I saw into a war party.

Digitized by Google

I believe these Indians as a whole are an inland people ranging over the mountains to the north and the plateau beyond; that like those bordering on the lower Orinoco they make periodic pilgrimages in groups to the river for the purpose of fishing or of gathering the turtle eggs which lower down are laid by the thousands in the sand-banks or bars in the very early spring. That they had no canoes, as I satisfied myself after repeated search, is convincing evidence of their not being a river people. The groups I saw were, no doubt, belated parties, for over all this north section of South America the Indians travel in this manner; there being no such thing as a tribe movement or a tribal head.

At midnight of the third night we were back at the Barrier, and by next noon drew up at the cache we had left two weeks before.

And now came the unhappy sequel to my otherwise happy adventure.

Believing that to give quickly is to give twofold, as the saying goes, I divided the sovereigns as we enjoyed our first smoke, telling Cristobal as I handed him his promised share that I was much pleased and intended to get a larger canoe for myself down the river and give him the small one for his own journey to the Negro. Then I dropped the buckskin bag with its remaining gold into my camera case, where, with the day-by-day note-book and pencils, I often placed it for safety when laundrying or bathing, as now I did before swinging my hammock. When I returned from the river I was somewhat surprised to find that Cristobal, usually a ready and deep

Digitized by Google

sleeper, had not put up his hammock, and I thought his unsolicited reason of wishing to smoke rather strange, for, if there is any luxury of indolence a Venezuelan enjoys more than another it is lolling in a hammock smoking.

I swung my hammock, but I remained wide awake, the incident being just enough unusual to arouse my curiosity, the almost sub-conscious guard of the wilderness traveller. I knew he was as tired as I and his stirring around puzzled as well as disconcerted me. When he had reseated himself after a second trip to the river, I concluded it time to investigate. Going down to the canoe I found it pushed off the bank whence I had drawn it, and loaded with the entire cache! It was as plain as type; Cristobal intended to decamp with the provisions.

Drawing the canoe again well up on land, I returned directly to my camera-box and as I stooped over it, Cristobal, evidently divining I was on to his game, bolted for the canoe. Covering him with my rifle I yelled, "para!" "para!" (stop) unheeded, however. Not wishing to harm him, though I boiled at the thought of his outrageous perfidy, I dropped the rifle and gave chase.

Speedily overtaking and tripping him, I rolled him down the bank; but regaining his feet he seized the canoe in an endeavour to drag it into the water. With a yank at his arm and a shove at his shoulder I loosed his hold, throwing him over again, and as he got on his feet, cursing and furious, he pulled a dirk-like knife out of his breech clout and came at me. It was a swift change of relationship from the recent almost intimate

Digitized by Google

association. Dodging his first quick lunge, I seized my sassafras paddle from the canoe and as he came again I swung it edge on into his stomach, doubling him up with a groan. Another sharp rap knocked the knife out of his hand, and as he was rather well done I sat down at hand to await the next chapter, heartsick at the thought that the lure of the sovereign could be so strong.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIII

UNDER THE SHADOW OF DUIDA

Notwithstanding my justifiable resentment of his treachery, the encounter with Cristobal weighed sorrowfully upon me as I sat watching him come back to consciousness. 'Twas not fear of the consequences of the engagement, nor remorse over the hurt I had given him which distressed me, but the thought that one human being could want one hundred dollars bad enough to leave another fellow creature foodless and boatless in a wilderness where rescue was an improbability and escape otherwise impossible. Precisely such a creature I had on my hands. Safe return down-stream in his company loomed as more of a problem than had advance beyond the Barrier. Of the unfriendliness of the denizens of the mystic land there was always the chance that it might, despite all the talk, prove merely a bit of local tradition left over from the eighteenth century conflict with the Spaniards. Cristobal's attitude, however, admitted of no conjecture; he lay before me, a living, tangible thing that had entirely uncovered his purpose and the extent he would go to execute it.

What in the world to do with him puzzled me sorely, nor was the question to be evaded; it had to be met and answered just as soon as he recovered from the swing of my paddle. To maroon him there with some supplies would have been the simplest solution, as well as the safest, and perhaps, too, a bit of poetic justice; but it was not to my liking. It came

Digitized by Google

too near to being a sentence of death since we were far beyond the reach of occasional Indian canoes, while inland stretched the forbidding, tropical forest—illimitable, untenanted, well-nigh impassable. I could not abandon him; some other course had to be devised, and I needed relaxation and sleep that I might face the question and the future with a fresher mind. I was very tired, worn out, indeed.

By the time Cristobal sat up, I had determined on a plan for the immediate future—that night—and as soon as he got on his feet, lost no time putting it in operation. No words were wasted on the Zambo. I commanded him to hand over the bag of sovereigns, which he did with grievous reluctance, and when I divided the gold and returned him half, he at first doubted my sincerity, but seized the coins hungrily as he understood I really meant him to have the promised share for accompanying me, and stowed the lot in the kind of breech clout he wore always, whether in or out of trousers. Briefly, I told him he must obey me instantly on the word or pay the full penalty of a man who has sought the life of a comrade. Keeping him always at arm's length or farther, so he could not spring upon me unawares, and with my revolver loosed in its holster, we rearranged the loaded canoe, and then started down river from that camp of unpleasant memory, the Zambo at his customary station in the bow and I at the steer paddle.

Making great time with the current in the middle of the river, we kept going until dusk, and then running to the left bank, I landed Cristobal with hammock, blanket and a meal of mandioca; where-

Digitized by Google

upon he lifted up his voice in lamentations, thinking, no doubt, I was preparing to desert him. He quieted when I announced that as I couldn't bring myself to abandon him as he richly deserved, and as I didn't trust him, I proposed crossing to the other side of the river for the long sleep I very much needed, and would return in the morning.

It was past noon when I awoke the next day (May 31) to hear the voice of Cristobal, like the wail of a lost spirit, rising and falling in a questioning call, which sounded weird enough coming up out of that vast jungle solitude. Giving answering halloa of reassurance, I floated the canoe, and, as with clear head and steadied nerves, after nearly eighteen hours of deep slumber, I paddled over to pick up the Zambo, the perplexities of the situation seemed less formidable. Disposal of the half-breed was no nearer fulfilment, but it harried me less. After a night's refreshment, the only possible course opened clearly to me—patent from the very first to one less perturbed—viz., to journey down-stream until a practicable solution presented. Hailing any Indian voyagers we happened to meet farther west and so transferring Cristobal sounded feasible, but did not, in the circumstances, appear wise. The game was not yet won, and I intended to hold my vantage by playing safe.

Thus we began our journey down the Orinoco, speeding along with the river, which was a good six to eight feet higher now than on our up trip and rising perceptibly every day, the Zambo doing his share of work without comment, and I ever ready for prompt action should the need be. Of

Digitized by Google

course, we stopped always before dark that there might be less temptation for Cristobal and more favourable conditions for me in finding a camp on the opposite bank after I had put him ashore; and on each occasion of our nightly separation, my late esteemed crew swore eternal loyalty by the name of his mother and the Virgin Mary.

As the third day drew to a close, we arrived off the mouth of the Guapo, near where I had found the Zambo three weeks before, and Cristobal asked that I land him, as on the small river he had, he said, "amigos" (friends)—a rather unhappy choice of word for him just then, as it aroused my suspicions at once. However, on deliberation, I concluded the Zambo himself had provided the best answer that could offer of the problem of what to do with him. He had begged not to be left at San Fernando de Atabapo, the nearest settlement, where he might run into trouble because of his army desertion, and, moreover, I had no wish to see Atabapo a second time, after my unpleasant previous visit. At the Guapo he would be no farther from his home port than when I picked him up, and was at least within striking distance of food, so it seemed really the natural conclusion to his voyage. None the less, I thought it the better part of valour to be cautious, and put in a little above the mouth of the Guapo, where I left him with the twenty sovereigns reward for going with me beyond the Barrier, four other sovereigns as wages for the twenty days we had been together, and three days' supplies.

Then out into the middle of the current again I

Digitized by Google

went on my way alone, rejoiced to a degree I could not make you believe.

All that night I paddled, impelled partly by the spirit of elation which possesses one when he turns his face homeward after successful adventuring, and partly because I considered it timely discretion to get away from this section of the river as rapidly as possible. By early noon I was passing Esmeralda, and two hours later reached the Casiquiare. Beyond here I tied up for a bit of rest and food as well as to do a little in the way of toilet making, which for three weeks past had begun and ended with moistening my face and brushing my teeth—and not always that much. So I was in need of attention—also I wished to put on "the other" shirt and the only trousers to replace the abbreviated coverings which exposed me needlessly now to insect attack. Not that the other pair was dry—nothing was; even the cached stuff was saturated. My canoe had no toldo, of course, so since starting up-river from the Guapo nearly a month before, there had been no protection from the rain; and as the rain fell upon us daily, sometimes nightly too, for good measure, it is easy to imagine the sodden condition of my equipment. Being alternately soaked and dried once or even twice on the same day was not an unusual occurrence, for while once wet meant to remain wet even under a toldo, yet the sun, when it shone, steamed the moisture out of you and whatever you wore.

In a thinnish, rather inviting spot on the north bank where the thermometer read 82°, the aneroid five hundred and fifty feet, with Duida shadowing my left shoulder, I stayed until late in the day, bringing

Digitized by Google

my notes to date from the last camp on the Casiquiare, eating, sleeping and sprucing up generally, until I felt once more like a white man. Here, as I sat, a small flock of grayish birds with white breasts, about the size of a thrush, flew near me, and of two others about the same size I especially noted, one was black with a long spreading tail and one brown with black and white spots on wing and throat. Though this humid upper Orinoco stretch displayed comparatively few examples of the brilliant tropical species, how I wished for the knowing eyes of a Frank Chapman on these jungle journeys!

It was lacking about an hour or two of dusk when I set out again down river.

From here, Maipures, the southern front of the great cataract, is about three hundred miles away. The mountains on the north which approach comparatively near to the river east of Esmeralda recede to the west of Duida, and the banks of the river take on somewhat the character of the Rio Negro, except that on the Orinoco the background is always of mountains. From the Casiquiare west, the south bank on the left is a great flat, and both banks are heavily covered to the water. It was a gloomy stretch of going had I been of mind to be affected; the truth is I was hilarious. Nothing could be sombre enough to sadden me, now; everything appeared gay.

Keeping to the middle of the river to get the utmost benefit of a swift and rising current, I made excellent time—at least six miles the hour, I should say—and revelled in the luxurious ease of downstream travel, with its freedom from insects, though my observations of the passing banks were less in-

Digitized by Google

ATURES, THE NORTH GATE

MAIPURES, THE SOUTH GATE

THE GREAT CATARACTS OF THE ORINOCO FROM AN OLD SPANISH MAP

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

forming than in the slower ascent. It is in working up-river hugging the banks to avoid the force of the current that you can better observe the plant and such animal and bird life as you may happen upon—and also receive the merciless insect attack in its entire fury. Descending such a river as the Rio Negro, for example, I doubt if one would be at all bothered by the busy pium, for even on the Orinoco, where the upper waters are bady infested, I was stung so comparatively little on the retreat as to make the experience unworthy of mention.

In two days I had done over one hundred miles and came to the mouth of the unexplored Ventuario, largest of Orinoco tributaries entering on the right or east bank, and a river which interested me so greatly that I had planned an expedition to its source the year previous, getting as near as Atabapo, only to have my efforts frustrated by failure to secure men. And here I was at last actually on its waters, but unable to do more now than take a cursory survey of its mouth, for, in my crewless and provisionless condition, exploration was out of the question.

Since the days of the Jesuits, those courageous pathfinders, no white man so far as known has passed inside the Ventuario's island-filled delta. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, the Spaniards were active on the upper Orinoco as far west as Esmeralda, and built a road inland so they could from the Orinoco reach their missions on the Caura *via* a portage and the Erewato and Ventuario rivers. They were admirably adventuresome, but pitilessly cruel to the Indians, who, towards the close of the century, finally wiped out the entire string of protect-

Digitized by Google

ing blockhouses, extending over a hundred miles, together with all the soldier defenders they could lay hands on in one night's concerted attack. So far as the white man is concerned, the fall of those blockhouses closed the road, which since has been reclaimed by the jungle; but the Caribs (once the flower and terror among Venezuelan Indians, of whom now only a degenerate remnant remain) continued, as they had before the advent of the brutal masters they helped massacre, to journey from the Lower to the Upper Orinoco, to the Casiquiare and even to the Rio Negro, by ascending the Caroni, or the Caura to the Erewato and thence by a several days' portage to the larger Ventuario.

They say there are impassable cataracts on the upper waters of the Ventuario; perhaps there are, though except for the insect pest of the Casiquiare, I have never found anything so bad as painted, especially in South America, where the conditions do not invite the native to adventuring. At all events, the Caribs passed this way, and what Indians did two hundred years ago white man can do to-day if he has the needed incentive. The only white man thus far in modern times to have attempted the penetration of this rugged region from whose mountainous interior spring the Ventuario, Caura, Caroni—great among the great tributaries of the Orinoco which bounds it on three sides, north, south and west—is Eugene Andre, who, about ten years ago (1902), essayed the Caura route with a party of Indians engaged on the Orinoco and thereabouts. Half-way up he lost his canoe in the rapids and barely escaped to the starting point at the Caura's mouth after a hazardous

Digitized by Google

retreat by raft and jungle, during which a couple of men were lost and the remainder of the company all but perished of hunger.

As the way appeared rather devious across the mouth of the Ventuario, I camped for the night just inside on the south or east bank, according to how you approach, that I might have at least a good look by daylight at the water course which had figured so largely in my day dreams. But nothing to especially distinguish it from other great contributaries to the Road showed so near the Orinoco; there is an uninteresting sameness, in fact, to all tropical water courses—particularly in their lower stretches. Except for its islands the mouth of the Ventuario might in general appearance answer for that of the Meta, or the Casiquiare, or the Guaviare. I found one new thing, however, in several short morning jaunts back from the bank, viz., a tall, coarse grass which cut my ear like a knife and made a really formidable obstruction to passage. I knew the grass and its character well enough to avoid it, but at the time of the encounter I happened to be following one of those solemn stalking herons in an effort to see it close by, and the shortest approach was through the grass. I often tried, but never did get a very near view of these birds, more frequently seen on the lower Orinoco, standing solitary and dejected like a sentinel weary of his job; the natives call them "soldados" (soldiers). They sound an unmusical note, and excepting the hoarse croak of the crocodile I know of none less pleasing for its volume.

What I did get a near and somewhat prolonged look at was a great ant-eater, or ant bear as some

Digitized by Google

call it, which was so busy with its slender snout and long, curved claws investigating a find that it failed to hear me stealing along in my endeavour to view the soldado. Such queer acting, unattractive brutes they are! The penned captives of the Zoo give no proper idea of their energy or activity. This one worked almost with the zest of a badger, making fine subject for a photograph had there been more light. Always the same disappointing camera story! Never is there light to get anything in the jungle interior, and when the amateur photographer comes to the comparative clearings it is sure to be raining, while views along the river are dreary and monotonous, not to mention the effect of the steaming humidity on his films. Not one in a dozen of my exposures resulted in a recognizable negative, though, of course, the treatment of my boxes, what with being under the rain so constantly and into the river several times from upset canoes, was not conducive to results and unfair to the film makers.

Another opportunity for a nature photograph at my camp here at the mouth of the Ventuario I wish I could have made the most of was an attack upon me of large black ants, one-half to three-quarters of an inch long. You may have read, as I had in some of the collections of natural history misinformation, that ants in their journeys en masse invariably keep to the ground. Perhaps this is true of the species ordinary to civilization, but these of which I speak swarmed over me in my hammock, turning me out in double quick time, for no insect with which I have had experience bites with the malignity of the biting ant.

Digitized by Google

When I sprang out of my hammock, both hands diligently combing and brushing and vigorously slapping my person from head to foot, I landed unaware in the midst of the marching army. It may sound ridiculous, no doubt, that an active pair of No. 7 shod feet should be overwhelmed, routed by mere ants, of which hundreds could be crushed to death at every stamp of the foot —but it's true, none the less. Until I had, in jumping around, got out of the line of march of the ant army, the battle was all one way. I could not kill or knock them off me fast enough to stand free of assault. The invasion of my hammock had begun before dawn, and daylight filtered through the jungle edge by the time I finally escaped the invaders, if not "bleeding at every vein," as the hero patriot of famous song, at least with every vein punctured and flaming.

Never in all my wilderness experience did I undergo such a thorough and painful insect "biting up." At broad daylight the ant army was still marching, millions of them, it appeared, in a column as much as a foot wide in places and never narrower than six inches; where I had fought them they spread to two feet over the multitude of carcasses that littered the ground. The line led to and deflected round the tree to which the foot-rope of my hammock was attached, but a division of great numbers filed up the tree itself, and, I was tremendously interested to note, many filed down again, though the returning ones seemed nowhere near so numerous as those advancing. My hammock line made a popular sidetrack for other battalions that

Digitized by Google

were climbing the tree to which my head-rope was fastened; and all the while the main body marched past the tree in its course, seemingly undiminished or undismayed by either desertion or disaster. It was a sight of which I never saw the equal, though, no doubt, it is habitual enough in the lives of these determined and industrious insects.

Swinging to the west and into the current where it joined that of the Orinoco, I got under way from my Ventuario camp, smarting and stewing, with plenty to occupy me until I had paddled beyond the various swirls and counter-currents of the islands and the meeting rivers. When I had quite regained the Orinoco again, not far to the west of the delta a couple of houses on the right bank caught my eye, and I wondered if they were all that remained of the once thriving mission of Santa Barbara. I did not stop, as the settlement suggested neither supplies nor canoes, and I was hitting the trail as hard as I knew how with no delay. As I looked forward to the estimated ten days' (it proved to be twelve) work ahead of me, I was simply afire with a desire to "eat 'em up," and I sang for very joy as my canoe sped down the long flowing road, which must have been moving near to its high water rate of six to seven miles the hour.

While the river is said to be at its full flood in August, and it was now only June, yet once in a while a solitary tree on a point past which the current raced close, told me we were within ten feet of the average maximum, which ordinarily ranges from thirty to forty feet above the minimum; although on my trip the year before at the time of low water

Digitized by Google

extreme marks were pointed out by the Indians which must have been sixty to seventy feet above our level. Such figures would probably denote a freshet; also allowance must be made for local pride —the "boosters" are not all confined to Los Angeles. But I have paddled through the forest time and again noting on the great trees among which I navigated a very plain high water mark twenty, thirty and forty feet above me, usually just at the base of the curiously wrought hanging baskets of which I have written, and which so often hold the exquisite, many-coloured orchid, the most delicately fashioned, I may add, of all jungle flora.

A few miles down the east bank, below where the Guaviare empties its yellowish waters into the Orinoco, after receiving without stain the black Atabapo, I came late the next afternoon upon a falca and four natives camped in about the first attractive spot I had seen on the upper Orinoco. The river here is a full mile wide, with great cone-shaped boulder-islands rising from the water, which in several instances seemed to match similar rock monuments deposited at intervals along shore. Inland an occasional hill relieves the hitherto doleful monotony of the unchanging forest, while far in the background lift the mountains. This is the beginning of that most picturesque stretch of all the Orinoco, starting just below the Guaviare and extending to the Meta north of the cataracts, with the thickly covered peaks of Sipapo at the east as its most conspicuous and altogether impressive sign post. Paralleled by the Sierra Parima, this region is in such strong contrast to the flat lower river as to appear of another and

Digitized by Google

strange country. To me, it appeared the most attractive bit of scenery in all South America east of the Andes, next to the rare scenic beauties surrounding the harbor of Rio Janeiro.

Although the forest came thickly to the river's edge, back of the strangers' camp a savannah-like opening afforded inviting relief from the gloomy woodland and the interminable river with its unvarying hedge of trees. It was a cheerful range for making acquaintance with the perceptibly increased number of birds, which, as we journeyed down-stream, multiplied more and more in species and numbers, until they reached the great quantity of colonies and individuals which make a veritable birdland of that part of the Orinoco where it turns to the east—and more especially of its western bank, over towards the bountiful Apure. Here where we were, humorous looking toucans, parrots, and herons of several dimensions were the most abundant, but also there were the spoonbill with its delicately tinted plumage, and macaws in colourings as loud as their rasping voices. So long as the daylight lasted the screaming parrots were always with us (to the very end of the river), and night brought, with an increased supply of insects, a curious drumming fish I had never before heard, which makes a noise exactly like the humming telegraph wire—you have no doubt heard by listening at the wire-strung pole.

In joining this party I had hoped to induce one of them to serve me as a crew, but they proved to be on their way to a small settlement below the Meta called Urbana, for trade, and while none would engage to accompany me, they offered to carry me to

Digitized by Google

AT THE EDGE OF THE ENCROACHING JUNGLE

BEAUTY UNADORNED ON THE ORINOCO

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

their destination for a sovereign. As I knew I could not get my canoe across the great cataracts from Maipures to Atures without help, which was not to be had on the ground, I accepted their proposal, abandoning the little dugout which had proved so serviceable, after transferring my now very small amount of luggage to their thirty-foot, toldo-topped boat. They had a good supply of cassava, the native bread, which was a treat indeed after so constant a diet of straight dried fish and mandioca, and a plenty of the local dried meat. The meat did not tempt me, being already familiar with the jaw-wearying Venezuelan variety which at its best is about the thickness of a knife blade and with all the unctuous succulence of leather.

My new friends were extremely curious as to my journeying, whence I had come and why I was alone, what I was doing; but appeared satisfied with my statement of being a hunter who had come from Maroa. Hunting to the average native is a sealed book opened only by the "Inglis" or the "Americano"—whose endurance of privations and long, hard trips for the mere purpose of shooting a beast or seeing a few birds they cannot at all comprehend.

Near by under the bank that night, a crocodile croaked at intervals like a tremendous basso profundo frog, and the insects raided heavily as if to warn us that we were nearing the great rock bulwark which marks where the Sierras cross the river, thus dividing it into Lower and Upper Orinoco.

At noon on the morrow we landed at Maipures, the southern face of the crossing.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIV

CROSSING THE GREAT CATARACTS

Forty miles separate Maipures on the upper Orinoco from Atures on the lower Orinoco, and every mile of it is filled during the wet season with fever, and always with insects and scenic splendour. Sending up a roar at either end which may be heard a mile or more, the river, throughout its picturesque course, plunges and whirls and flattens, expands and contracts, according to the character of the obstacle impeding its progress. Occasionally narrowing to a couple of hundred feet, it lashes itself into one long stretch of foam and vapour as it riots between rock-lined shores; again it speeds along between wood-covered banks in comparative calm. In some spots it presents an unbroken surface; in others, thickly placed rock islands leave turbulent channels scarcely twenty feet wide. Often on its banks a palm of unusual height and beauty lifts its feathery top above the surrounding jungle, and every once in a while conical "cerros" (mounts) rise from fifty to two hundred feet, now out of forest, again out of rock-covered meadow, standing isolated or in groups as last monuments of the crossing sierras through which the tumultuous river has literally carved a thoroughfare.

Ever in the background may be seen one of the mountain spurs which the Parimas send off in several directions under varying names from the centre of that immense region bounded on three of its sides

Digitized by Google

by the Orinoco, and whence rise the Ventuario, the Caura, and the Caroni rivers. The mountains close in on the south entrance to this land pass, while at the north gate at Atures, a lone but lofty cerro rises out of the plain to the west. It is a scene of rare charm, unique in nature's offerings the world over. The pity that also it should be a notorious pest hole! for here the ascending voyager comes first to know a real plague of insects. He makes painful acquaintance with the "zancudo," the giant gnat despoiler of the night, and with that vicious daylight worker, the little "jen-jen," a venomous fly relative of the Brazilian pium. The "calentura," as the fever is called, also adds danger to discomfort; while the withering humidity incubates the poison deposited in susceptible veins. Although no hotter during the day than elsewhere on the Road (the average of my thermometer in February–March was 88° to 90°, and in June 95°), the nights are excessively muggy, and as on the river beyond Esmeralda, unrelieved by any breeze. But of local evils, Zancudo & Co. are, to my thinking, the most formidable; you may escape the fever, but the jen-jen and its night-shift are inevitable. On these two insects rest all odium for the distracting annoyances which beset the wayfarer on the portage.

On each of my three crossings, some of the accompanying party succumbed to the fever, but on no occasion was I touched, though I am bound to say I regard myself somewhat immune after my extended experience. I have, it is true, had a day or two of feeling quite seedy, but never been compelled to stop in camp an hour during my jungle adventuring, either in Asia or South America, or

Digitized by Google

East or West Indies—and my wanderings have carried me into very active fever breeding districts. This exemption I attribute partly to natural health and strength, but mostly to intelligent care of my stomach; to moderate eating of simple food—as nourishing as may be—and especially to extremely moderate drinking of *spiritus frumenti;* abstinence, in fact, except at moments of chill from inordinate wetting. At such times a small horn of rum with plenty of lemon is a preventive of that fever herald ague, and not unagreeable to the taste of the average hunter. Against insects, however, there is no preventive; and next to the Casiquiare River, this portage remains unrivalled the full length of the Road for their malignity.

On the south side a considerable tribe of the Maipure Indians once dwelt and maintained a more or less predatory warfare against the Atures that had their headquarters on the north side. But nothing now remains of these one time active people save their names, given by the missionaries to the great cataracts at each terminal of the strait, and the cavern tomb of the Ataruipe where rest the bones of many of the lost tribe of Atures.

Those left try to wrest a living from the uncongenial surroundings, aided largely by what they earn from the few travellers through transporting cargoes overland and assisting the passage of the canoes among the rocks. The man who on one trip took my stuff across to Atures in his ox-drawn cart told me, indeed, that without the wage made from voyagers he could not remain on the portage.

As if their life's burden was not already heavy to

Digitized by Google

ON THE LOWER ORINOCO

THE OX-CART PACKING MY OUTFIT OVERLAND AT THE GREAT CATARACTS—ONE OF THE GREAT BOULDER MOUNDS IN THE BACKGROUND

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

the crushing point, jaguars keep the poor, straggling Indians hereabouts in more than the usual terror—presumably one of Mother Nature's little ironies in thus guarding with wild beasts, as it were, a spot essentially so uninviting as to repel residence. If there were cattle on the isthmus, the rather open and rock-filled savannahs of the west side might offer bait for "el tigre" (jaguar), and give just cause for his bad name, which, as it is, seems to me undeserved. There are vouched-for records of one jaguar having carried off a child, and of another openly attacking and killing a woman, but I saw nothing of the big cat and heard nothing to justify its local reputation. Yet it holds the Indians in subjection none the less.

Roughly outlined, this "land strait," as Humboldt authoritatively called it, may be described as forty miles of savannah-topped rocky isthmus and tumbling water plentifully strewn with boulders, rapids and cataracts.

When I ascended the river they told me the cataracts are more easily crossed in the time of high water; on my down trip, low water was declared best suited to the attempt. The truth is, the difficulties vary a bit in kind but mighty little in degree; the passage in all seasons is arduous in the extreme and hazardous to the canoe and, in places, to the men. Perhaps, when going up-stream at low water, we had a trifle less trouble at the Atures end and more under like river conditions at Maipures, which contains an eight- or ten-foot-high rock dike, whereas the deeply imbedded Atures has swifter water but no obstruction so tremendous. In the main, however, the cataracts present similar impediments to the voyager,

Digitized by Google

viz., stretches of rapid water racing over a succession of rock dams or benches, many of them bearing names given by the Indians. Between these benches, islands divide and still further quicken the swift river into narrow channels through which the water boils and cascades to test the utmost skill of the canoemen. Some of these islands are low and flat, others several hundred feet long bear cone-shaped hills and most of them send off cavernous, granite islets which serve as refuge harbours to the canoeist laboriously ascending, but add another point of prospective shipwreck in the mad rush down-stream through the churning, twisting channels.

Where the benches were low and the bed not too full of rocks, we stuck to the canoe in the down passage and hauled by rope on the up trip, but mostly the empty craft was passed along from rock shelf to rock shelf, an exhausting task with the river slamming you about and tripping you up, endangering both your boat and your head. Where the going is at its worst, the canoe is carried along shore until another flotation may be attempted. So you keep it up for all of the forty miles of land strait separating the Upper from the Lower Orinoco. And whether you are bound up-stream or down, getting across the isthmus is like a hurried, anxious scramble over a rocky and slippery causeway, where a single misstep will plunge you headlong into the seething waters below.

We had wretched crossings going down—three days of heavy rain with intervals of zancudo attack, which usually attains to activity nothing short of fiendish just before and just after a downpour, and

Digitized by Google

two of the crew rolled in their blankets fever-stricken during practically the entire passage. Luckily we had less portaging along shore on the up-trip, which consumed the better part of a week, although log-rolling the canoe overland would have come as a welcome relief to our short-handed drudgery among the granite blocks of the rampant river, that not only snatched the canoe out of hand, but hurled us aside contemptuously as it willed. Yet the shooting-the-chutes way we slipped through some of the narrow channels gave exhilarating moments that repaid the toil of the heavier, less enlivening work.

On the ten-mile portage which terminates the Atures side of the strait, I left the canoe to the reinforced crew and went on foot across the bare, boulder-scattered savannah while the cargo followed in ox carts at a pace which took all day for the journey. Incidentally the trip provided a very fair exposition of the average local intelligence. In packing the cart, the Indians stowed away under my rubber sheet some canned stuff picked up at Maipures, and left my blanket and duffle bags on top exposed to the rain! of which, by the way, less than usual fell. In fact, for the first time in many weeks, I experienced almost an entire afternoon of sunshine, and took several photographs, though only a poor one of the ox carts with one of the cone-shaped cerros in the background resulted, because, I suppose, of the later steamings and river baptism to which the films were subjected before I finally reached Bolívar.

What a pleasure it was to give my legs a real good stretching! one gets so canoe weary. Despite the insects, which were making the most of the unusual

Digitized by Google

weather, the walk gave me great pleasure and an intimate knowledge of these curious and picture-making rock meadows. Except for doves, there were almost no birds; indeed, bird life is scarce at the cataracts, and the somewhat sharply drawn incongruity of cooing peace birds and devilishly murderous jen-jens amused me as I sat on a granite cube listening to the one and lustily defending myself against the other. Across on the north side, however, I descried a grand king-fisher, two of them, in fact, and shot a bird new to me called "land duck" by the natives, which was tough eating.

On a small tributary river beyond the last cataract, I found the canoe and the Indians in a hot and insect-ridden camp, and here with the roar of the rapids rising and falling as a fitful breeze played over us, I swung my hammock for the last time on this colourful but vexatious isthmus.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XV

RACING THE LOWER ORINOCO

After so tempestuous a portage, the lull and the indolence of the bay at the northern harbour (Atures) was balm to high tension nerves and jaded muscles. 'Tis a haven providentially placed, and Bay of Content should be its name. Like the roadside hostelry of the two-faced sign, it affords cheer for the traveller in either direction. Going down-stream, it is a welcomed rest house where he seeks composure and takes stock of belongings—including his bones; going up, after five hundred miles of some sailing and much paddling, it is equally welcome to the adventurer as the passage to the little known upper Orinoco and a signal to gird up loins for the approaching struggle to the southern gateway at Maipures, where nature provides no similar spot of tranquillity amid its wilder splendours.

A becoming omen of the comparative peace of the lower river is the Bay, yet, after all, but a breathing spot, for not until we have passed under the impressive mountain-flanked portal at the Zambore River, and have crossed the mouth of the Meta, do we reach untroubled water. As immediately above the cataracts the Orinoco (apparently to conserve its strength for the crossing) holds to a half-mile path, so also immediately below it retains the force of its narrowed track until these outposts of the conquered Parimas at the Zambore are passed. Here, sweeping grandly through the huge, granite gateway, it

Digitized by Google

rushes along in furious haste, to open again into another two-mile bay before finally changing into the less hampered and broader course.

There are three miles of this impetuosity at Zambore just above the Meta, and almost half of it is over rock—huge granite blocks singly and in loosely joined company, making a weary path for the up-stream voyager, especially in low water.

My ascent from the Meta to Atures cost me, in February, three, hard full days, with a narrow escape from shipwreck in the whirling waters around the great mid-stream boulder El Tigre; down-stream over the same course, in June, I was twelve hours on my first journey and ten on my second! Every time I passed this bay I landed to get a "howler," a large, reddish monkey, and possessor of the most outlandish voice ever I heard in jungle or out of it. I never succeeded, though I had several near views of a small monkey of white face and black muzzle, which huddled in pairs and looked down with so pitiful an expression I could not find heart to shoot as my men requested—roast monkey being relished by some Indians. I often thought I'd taste the flesh to satisfy my curiosity as to its flavour, but never did so—even with hunger fairly established among us.

On passing the Meta, one comes into a new country; the banks grow more open and varied, the forest scatters, the mountains recede, animal and particularly bird life increases. The river widens, sandy shores come first in evidence, and because of the more gentle land slope, the speed of its current slackens, while islands and bays in places give it almost the appearance of an estuary. It is the same Orinoco,

Digitized by Google

only now tamed, though here and there it breaks the peace bonds for a short period of rampage. Expanding to over a mile in width after the run through Zambore, it is never less and sometimes adds another mile en route until at Urbana it spreads, according to season, from two miles to four. Where farther along it turns east and is joined by the Apure, entering from the northwest, it becomes an inland sea, which was all of five or six miles across on the several times I saw it in June and never less than two miles in low water.

The character of the contingent country undergoes as much change as the river itself. From the quarter-mile mouth of the mud-coloured Meta, all that west bank to the Apure is so low, even in its northern quarter, as to become largely flood land in high water. On the east bank, the isolated rock cerros make practically their last important appearance a bit north of the bay at the Meta; while the mountain spurs, to which, on the descent, one has become accustomed, diminish and withdraw until a short two-mile bit five or six hundred feet high off Urbana is the first signal of the plain country and the last vanguard of the mountainous interior—the beginning or the end, according to whether you are headed up-river or down.

Between the Meta and a little settlement called Caicara, just inside the bend made by the Orinoco's sharp turn to the east, are many exposed beaches of islands and flood land and sand shoals—loosely called "playas." These are the chosen and populous resorts of the crocodiles and the turtles. At the lowest water the latter gather in multitudes, and while the New

Digitized by Google

World representative of the Old World saurian is mostly in evidence in the time of rains and affects the shoals and the flood-land, the turtles are more discriminating, and confine themselves to the islands, especially the islands near Urbana, which is halfway between Caicara and the Meta. Here, in February and March, nature puts on view one of the most remarkable of her amazing exhibitions—a spectacle like unto that of the great flamingo nesting colony with which the illuminating photographs and studies of Frank M. Chapman have acquainted us.

There are two kinds of turtles on the Orinoco; one bears a dark green shell about a foot in diameter; the other averaging twice as large, weighs about fifty pounds and has a grayish shell and flat head heavily furrowed between the eyes. Neither of these is found on the upper river, but a fresh water tortoise, about the size of and similar in aspect to the smaller, is said to abound above the cataracts and to supply edible eggs and flesh to the Maquiritares. I sometimes saw this turtle in the water, and learned that though it is sought for food it does not, like the larger one, lay in colonies and, therefore, conducts no yearly assemblage to attract the Indians. On the lower river the smaller is an inconsequential figure denied even the right of its generic name, for the natives commonly employ only the general term, "tortuga," which simply means turtle, and is invariably and exclusively applied to the large one.

What with its flesh providing meat and its eggs both meat and a commercial oil, the tortuga comes near to being to the natives on the Orinoco and Ama-

Digitized by Google

zon what the caribou is to the Indians of the far Northwest. Certainly it shares with fish in furnishing the basic food yield of the Road north of the Argentine. And a most palatable flesh it offers. I had no opportunity to try it in my hurried and out of season voyages on the Orinoco, but on the Amazon and the lower Rio Negro, fried in its own oil, I ate it often and found it tasteful—as fried things go. Next to peixeboi, I liked it best of local offerings, the fish being, as a rule, coarse or of little flavour. Of turtle eggs, I cannot speak as highly, although they are much relished by the Indians; for me they had a peculiar and not pleasing oily taste. Perhaps full stores at the time made me fastidious.

On the Amazon, the turtle lays its eggs in September, but on the Orinoco, extreme low water comes in late January, and at that time in the waters farthest from travel and on the islands amid the least used channels begins the every year gathering of the tortuga host.

And what a host! I have seen the beach of an island literally covered by them and could have seen the same sight on many other beaches, had I not confined my observations to the one out of respect to the feelings of the natives, who, during these periods, avoid the known breeding grounds so the turtles will not be disturbed. During all of February, the turtles thus disport themselves on the beaches under the burning sun—a necessary stimulant, the Indians maintain, to the following function of egg laying. Early in March, the sun bath being completed and the signal set, the turtles swim in companies to such other beaches as they have been wont

Digitized by Google

to frequent only for the purpose of laying their inch-round, white eggs.

It is an accepted fact among the Indians that, whereas great throngs of turtles sun together on a given beach, they divide into troops when the eggs press, and journey to other beaches, the same each year if unmolested. On the beach of these chosen islands, always in the night, they deposit their eggs in holes of about two feet in depth by as much in diameter, digging rapidly with their powerful feet as the pressure comes upon them. At times, when the seemingly uncontrollable egg flow has prematurely started, they usurp the prepared or even partly or entirely filled nest of a nearby and more provident turtle. The Indians of the Orinoco say the tortuga lays from seventy-five to one hundred eggs each. Naturalist Bates, whose thorough studies on the Amazon give authority to his statements, says the Amazonian turtle lays one hundred and twenty eggs; and on both divisions of the flowing road, the clutch, if I may borrow the word, occupies about half the hole, which for the rest the turtle dirt fills level with the beach in which it is dug.

Until the turtles have all deposited their eggs, the Indians protect them from intrusion, but once the holes are filled they lose no time flocking to the scene, and forthwith, in the last of March or first of April, the harvest begins. With long, slender sticks, they travel up and down the beach sounding for the covered eggs, often destroying many, despite the tough membrane casing, in their eagerness to outstrip a companion explorer. It is not the harvest it used to be, when the catch was large enough to bring plenty

Digitized by Google

to practically all of the inhabitants on the river between Atures and Apure. The same old story of greed with which we of the North are familiar—leaving no eggs to hatch—is answerable for the depleted supply. Traffic in oil is still an item of local importance, but as about two thousand eggs are required to produce a gallon, the demand on both the supply and native industry is too heavy to warrant serious development in a commercial way.

Nor is man the only one to exact toll of the tortuga. The eggs which are overlooked by the natives are sought with persistence and rising appetite by jaguars, crocodiles, herons and various members of the rat family—the jaguar preying also upon the turtle itself, which he turns on its back to helplessly await the pleasure of this great cat's feeding. The heron, with its long beak, sounds for eggs with nearly the prescience and all the success of the Indians. Indeed, once the turtles have left their nest, the beach becomes a scene of egg carnage and vicious reprisal, beginning with man as the first and most audacious actor and extending down through animal, bird and reptilian imitators, to the timid agouti which comes trembling upon the scene sniffing, not too far from the bush edge, for the possible leavings of the others.

Such eggs as escape intelligent search and predatory prowlers hatch out little turtles, which, under cover of night, unaided, dig out of their sand hole, and, unguided, find their way to shallow water, where, if the bottom is rock-strewn, they are safe from all their enemies, even the crocodiles. A striking illustration of hereditary instinct it seems to me, for it is, no doubt, because of an inherited struggle for exist-

Digitized by Google

ence that the tortuga invariably deposits its eggs and the hatched appear in the protecting darkness.

Not so with the crocodile—it has no need to hunt seclusion or the cover of night to produce its young. On the playas its eggs are deposited in several separate holes, and at the time of hatching, the mother, in the broad light of day, returns to help the young out of the sand and to herd them back among the overflow pools where life is more prosperous and less liable to accident. Like the jaguar, the crocodile of these remote parts has nothing to fear on land or in the water, unless it be one another. The Indians used often to tell me of fights between these two in which the jaguar was mostly the loser—but I never saw such an encounter, or knew of such a one being authenticated. No doubt in the water, a full-grown crocodile could worst a jaguar, and as the latter are occasional swimmers and usually range near a stream, such combats are entirely probable. I cannot, however, picture a jaguar beaten on land by a crocodile, be it the biggest imagination can picture.

It is commonly said that crocodiles are vicious and aggressive. First and last, in Malaya and South America, I have seen quite a lot of the brutes and hold the contrary belief, with the reservation that they are quite liable to attack if they can do so unobserved. In other words, I consider the crocodile a coward that will never assail you if your eye is on him. It is true the hideous creature will lurk about a settlement or at a specific spot from which it has been driven. In my own experience I have known of its repeatedly entering at night the compound of a small collection of huts on the Malay coast, to

Digitized by Google

terrorize the wretched people and finally to seize and partly carry off a sleeping young woman.

Where not effectually repulsed, *i.e.*, actually hurt, it will sneak again and again to a locality where a tidbit offers, such as dog or pig or chicken or child, growing bolder with each unharmed adventure, until it really reduces the place to practical vassalage. Often some little settlement is thus held in subjection until guns are brought to raise the siege—knives and spears being, as a rule, the extent of armament at the average Malayan hut. At such a terrorized hamlet, where a baby boy had been seized at its play in broad day near the water whence it had strayed, I once spent a week of bloody warfare, killing a baker's dozen of the beasts—three of them in the basin whither the people went for their water. Many a dog and small pig has been seized as it lowered its head to drink, and often a child sent to the water-hole unaccompanied or unaware of danger has been dragged in as it stooped to fill the jar—for the water-hole is a favourite lurking ground of the crocodile which has singled out a village for toll, and even the men and women need to be on the lookout.

The crocodile hunts singly; I have never heard of a case where they have invaded in company, or of an instance of seizure in which more than one has been concerned. And it seems strange to me that the beast should leave companions in order to make a seizure. Is there a confederacy, and one chosen to do the hunting? Or, among a given company in given water near by a settlement, do they take turns in hunting? Is it the same one which nightly makes the attempt to drag down the human morsel? Do

Digitized by Google

they share the spoils, or does the successful monster retire to a secluded spot for his feast? Were the crocodiles which continued nightly to visit the hamlet and the creature which captured the child near the water-hole one and the same, or had those I here subsequently slaughtered alternated the vigil and the stalk? It is difficult to say, for among a troop of crocodiles there is no distinguishing mark save size. Is the man-eater, as in the case of the maligned tiger, one by accident or by nature? Is it perverted or acquired taste?

My opinion is that the crocodile, which preys upon a number of smallish, more or less to its eyes, dog-like, jungle animals, such as the several tiny deer in Malaya and the many members of the rat family in South America, has its attention first drawn to these hamlets by dogs, perhaps, and thus on forays becomes acquainted with the chickens and the humans, while with pigs it already has a jungle intimacy. Moreover, the crocodile is a forager which takes whatever in its sneaking path is unaware or not too large; an opinion, so far as disposition is concerned, shared by as eminent a herpetologist as Raymond L. Ditmars, Curator of Reptiles at the N. Y. Zoological Park, who says that in captivity the crocodiles become so bold as to attack the careless or unwatchful keeper. In the wilderness, so far as my observation goes, what the crocodile secures it takes away to devour alone if it can, or fights for a share if it must; it does not drag its victim to the water if it is not interrupted or pursued, or if its quarry can be consumed on the spot. Considering the smallness of its throat, the theory that it enjoys

Digitized by Google

mostly the blood and fat may account for its never seeking anything so large, as, for instance, the capybara. I have seen it rend on the spot of seizure a small animal about the size of the common rabbit, and I have seen several crocodiles fight savagely over a poor dog one of them had dragged into the water from the bank where it was incautiously drinking.*

What I have written here of the crocodile foraging for human meat is the result of Far Eastern observation. I have never heard of similar exhibitions along any part of the Road, or, indeed, in any part of South or Central America or Mexico or Cuba or the West Indies where I have journeyed. Yet the natives everywhere have a firmly established and entirely warranted dread of the loathsome brute, which, while never attacking in the open, so far as I have ever heard, is always liable to pounce upon a helpless victim unconscious of its presence. That is why in crocodile infested rivers you should never, from the bank, dip up water without first exploring it with a long stick, for to lie close to the edge and thus to catch the drinking animals is a favourite game of the ugly thing; nor should you approach water-holes without careful scrutiny of the jungle immediately surrounding. Moreover, it is helpful to bear in mind that the crocodile belongs to the arrant class that ambush their quarry and you need never fear the one in sight. The yarns about crocodiles

* Feeding immediately on capture is not usual, crocodiles being thought to prefer their meat quite "high" in flavour and accustomed to hide a kill until it attains to the necessary degree of decomposition. But this, like all rules, has its exceptions.

Digitized by Google

attacking men in canoes and knocking them off the stern with their tails into the water for easier capture are fully out of accord with my experience and probably may be classed with the weird stories which filter through town-confined government officers and sea captains to tourists who spread them in more substantial forms.

On the playas of this reach of the Orinoco, on two descents, I saw more crocodiles than I thought the entire river held, yet they were suprisingly difficult of near approach. Time and again, after a very careful stalk to where I had viewed a troop sunning, I came within camera range only to see them sliding into the water, and although I shot many, I never succeeded in being near enough for a photograph when there was a fair light. I do not regard the killing of them as sport. My shooting was for the purpose of securing data on their length, and I picked out of each company only those which appeared unusually large—incidentally, I found them fairly easy practice here, making a very much higher average of kills than in Malaya, where mostly one must take them in the water, and unless killed instantly they are apt to go to the bottom. The biggest crocodile I potted on the Orinoco measured twelve feet three inches, and was next to the largest one I saw, which could not have been short of fifteen feet as he lay apart from companions on the point of a long sand shoal. I felt so sure of securing his photograph that I left my rifle in the canoe, when, from the bank on the down-stream side, I began a cautious approach, hidden by the slant of the playa; but when, after arriving near the end, I crawled to the crest with camera ready, no crocodile giant was in sight. I

Digitized by Google

IN THE APURE DELTA NEAR WHERE THE APURE AND ORINOCO MEET

TYPICAL HOUSE AND SURROUNDINGS ON THE LOWER PORTUGUESA

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

sometimes wondered, after such experiences, if they could scent me, and, at least, I learned that for all their sluggishness, a crocodile can move quickly if need be.

In the English edition of Humboldt it is recorded that he encountered crocodiles on the Orinoco measuring twenty-four and twenty-five feet in length, but I am inclined to believe the translator has taken liberties with that distinguished explorer's original, or misread his comment. It is not unlikely Humboldt encountered tales of such reptiles; the Indians with me at the time of my record kill said there were others much larger, and on being urged to say how much larger, paced off from one mark in the sand to another—about twenty feet. Over in the Lake Maracaibo country, a man assured me he had seen one dead on the bank of a contributing river, killed in some way unaccountable, which was twenty feet long. All I can say is, that I never saw one so large on the Orinoco or the Apure or the Parana, or heard of an authenticated case beyond eighteen feet. The average size of those I killed and saw in South America was ten feet upwards; in Malaya, one I shot on the coast measured nineteen feet seven inches, but the average was little over twelve feet.*

Urbana is six hundred miles up the Orinoco and

* Mr. Ditmars declares that the caimans, which are frequently confused with crocodiles, although smaller, are more closely related to the alligators than to the crocodiles, notwithstanding that several species have sharp snouts like the latter. The further fact that among South American crocodiles some have sharp and others blunt, alligator-like snouts, makes distinction difficult for the layman. All of my kills were sharp snouted like the Malayan or true crocodile.

Digitized by Google

about half that distance from Venezuela's capital city, which was founded in 1764, and once appropriately known as Angostura (the narrows), but now, with its 9000 people, called Bolívar, to honour the "libertador," Simón Bolívar.

It has the best opinion of itself of any of the settlements between Bolívar and San Fernando de Atabapo; for one reason, because it is nearest the turtle islands, and for another, on account of its having as many as ten habitable houses strung out in a row at the base of a point which projects into the Orinoco at perhaps the river's widest stretch, next to that where the Apure comes in to swell the summer flood. From here it had taken five active days to go up to the Meta, but my second descent was made in two.

On my first trip, I drifted past the hamlet in my own canoe after laying in a bountiful supply of the half-inch-thick disks of cassava, for which the little place appears justly famed; but on the second coming, fortune was not so kind. The crew that had proved both companionable and competent could go no farther, and there appeared no immediate prospect of replacing them, although half a dozen canoes were moored to the bank and men in plenty lounged around the houses. But after patient recruiting and dickering, I finally succeeded engaging four who agreed to take me to Caicara. The canoe they provided was a bongo modelled out of what must have been a monster tree, as it was full fifty feet long, about two feet deep and three feet wide amidships, with neither toldo for the top nor gratings for the bottom. It had been used as a cargo carrier and was

Digitized by Google

an unwieldy as well as a cranky craft for five men, our light luggage making so little impression on its draft that we could barely reach the water with our paddles. To undertake a journey in such a boat, so inadequately equipped, was, of course, foolhardy, but Caicara is not more than a day and a night's run in a strong current. Furthermore, it was the only transportation obtainable after long hours of search and eloquence.

Adept to a diabolical degree in placing stumbling blocks before the foreign wayfarer is a certain vicious class of interior Venezuelan and Brazilian!

So we set sail, which is poetic license for saying that the bongo lumbered from under the point and went wobbling along in the current, spasmodically aided, so to say, by a nondescript crew, among whom the author held the honoured station of patrón. We must have made an impressive spectacle for the beholders, and it is too bad the photograph I took of the bongo and its native crew just before starting could not have been saved from subsequent wreck.

The Arauca River, rising well up in the foot of the eastern slope of the Andes, or, as officially called, the Cordillera Oriental, becomes, for a space of several hundred miles, like both the Orinoco and the Meta, a line of boundary between Colombia and Venezuela. Where it finally joins the Orinoco not very far below Urbana, there is a plentiful sprinkling of rocks, and the result is the Concession Rapids—prophetic name! Here, in our clumsy boat, of necessity clumsily handled, we turned over on a rock, and the entire Orinoco, it seemed, swept through the bongo from end to end, washing out the crew and every

Digitized by Google

last article except my field-glasses, which had caught by the case strap onto a projecting nail in the point of the bow, and a quite small waterproof canvas bag containing my note-book and money, that was fastened, as usual, by its strap to the seat. Food, clothing, rifle, camera, tin film cases, bedding, not a thing escaped the river. Of all the photographs only one pack of twelve was saved. The crew was as widely distributed as the cargo and had to swim for the bongo, which, after a game of battledore and shuttlecock among the rocks, cruised to the far side of the river, where in a deep bend we overtook it bobbing along bottom side up. We spent an hour or two seeking our scattered stuff, but the sum total of our find was a blanket, several soggy slabs of cassava, one hat, and my camera, so battered as to be useless thenceforth. It is illustrative of confirmed habit that each one of us retained his grasp on his paddle—in my case the favourite sassafras.

Such a catastrophe would not have overtaken us had we been properly shipped, for these rapids should be safely negotiated at all times. Yet we were not blameless; had my crew been of better stuff, I believe our passage would have been without accident. As it was, however, they aroused from slouchy work too late, and without their vigorous and concerted help I, at the steer paddle, could not master the lout of a canoe, which, once out of control amidst the rocks, nothing but providence could save from disaster; and providence doubtless thought we needed punishment, as we did.

From Caicara, where we arrived on the second morning out, with appetites somewhat whetted as

Digitized by Google

you may imagine, I had the same difficulty getting away as from Urbana, plus insolent extortion. The village, if I may so dignify a handful of adobes, was quickly and very much alive to my wanting a canoe and crew, and seemed disposed to make the most of the situation. Men were willing to be engaged, but at figures double the established rate. It wasn't the demand, but the manner of it, that determined me to disappoint their sneering confidence of having me at their mercy. Strolling from the forum, as it were, I found in the afternoon a man living apart from the settlement, who sold me, for five of the last eight sovereigns I possessed, a small dugout, which I forthwith stocked with cheese and cassava, the only edible things I could secure, preparatory to pursuing my journey alone. At this evidence of self-reliance volunteers at the usual wage simply flocked to me, but being now in full command of the situation I graciously declined their service, wishing them the while *bon voyage* for another journey, warmer than the torrid Orinoco.

Thus saluting the Alcade and paying my warm respects in unequivocal terms to the city fathers, as well as to their brothers and sons and other male relatives, I had slipped the painter of my craft and was backing out into the river in order to courteously face the reciprocal greetings, hosannas and other things coming my way, when the only good man of my late crew, a halfbreed named Blas, called from the bank asking to be taken.

Blas was the best native product I met on the Orinoco. During the four days and nights of almost continuous travel which now followed before

Digitized by Google

arriving at Bolívar, he laboured quite as steadily as I, without equal incentive, uttered no plaint at the stint of provisions, and was a cheerful companion throughout constant hard work. It was work with adversity, too, for on the first night we ran foul that drifting octopus one sometimes encounters on the lower river in the wet season—a derelict tree keeping pace with the current, butt foremost, roots and branches reaching high and wide to enmesh every luckless thing in its path. It fell upon us in the late dark. Blas, at my bidding, had lain down for a nap while I at the stern kept the canoe to our course, when suddenly out of the quiet and the blackness of the night came the disconcerting clasp of its root tentacles. It was my first intimation of its presence, and a queer sensation it gave me! The careening canoe shook Blas out of his slumber and he was quickly to my assistance, but we were nearly overset before getting free unharmed, save for loss of a few cakes of cassava.

Next morning as we came into the last reach of the Orinoco where it runs straightway to the east we picked up a couple of men whose help I was glad to have, as we were now in the region of the "chubasco," a squall similar to the pampero of the Plata, caused by shifting and very strong sea winds blowing up-stream against the current. These burst upon you so suddenly that from the middle of the river it is impossible to reach the bank, although you start at first sight of the warning cloud, for in the rough water you must perforce take the wave bow on and so cannot head straight for the bank. I have never had such disturbing or muscle breaking moments at the steer end

Digitized by Google

of a canoe as in any one of several chubascos which fell upon us with a swiftness unbelievable. Even in its normal condition the river at this part was too rough for a dugout such as we had, and during the squalls the waves mounted high around us. I fully expected at the time to be swamped, and to this day I do not understand how our canoe lived through at least two of those storms.

Where the river straightened out, we kept close to the hotter course inshore to avoid the rougher water, thus losing much of the current's help, but partly recompensed by the bird life almost constantly in sight. Cranes and egrets held their perch as we glided noiselessly by, close enough to see startled questioning in their dull eyes; a solitary fishing great heron stretched its long neck to watch us until past; some small reptile—one of the fifty-seven million varieties of lizards, no doubt—scurried at the feet of this long fisherman without disturbing his equanimity; a flock of large, black birds, bigger than robins, with long spreading tail, kept ahead of us from bush to bush; a crane less curious or more timorous than his fellows flapped his way slowly inland; a hawk-like bird, large as an eagle, circled overhead; a band of twittering local swallows, small but noisy, skittered by; high above a pair of macaws crossed with the speed of a duck, sounding their harsh note unendingly; parrots filled a nearby bit of wood with their unpleasant voice; there were ducks on the sand bars and ibis and spoonbill under the banks. Such was the bird life about us on the savannahs which now topped the banks. It was cheering to lose sight of the sombre forest line, and to see in-

Digitized by Google

stead the llanos along the north horizon. And the breeze was a blessing after the windlessness which makes the Upper Orinoco so trying.

The rain was diminishing, though storms of utmost severity burst upon us with frequency in the afternoon, but when clear, the sunsets were of radiant glory—lilac and gold effects prevailing in the cloudful sky; and as the short twilight neared its eclipse an irregular yellow behind a deep blue added an occasional arrangement of surpassing beauty among great masses of mounting cumuli.

The sun was hot, but the breeze directly off the Atlantic brought relief, and after the upper river the insect pest seemed mild to inconsequence; even the jen-jen appeared but a trifler. We were on the well-travelled route which leads from Apure to Bolívar and so on to Trinidad. It was good to be alive after all—even on cheese and cassava.

Bright and early on a late June morning, the twenty-second day from that on which I had looked last upon the Casiquiare, about 1000 miles up-river, my canoe grated the sloping bank of Ciudad Bolívar, and I stood upon the beach, bare-legged to the thighs, looking, no doubt, in tattered shirt, like a derelict cast up by the sea. Luckily, it was 4.30 A.M.

My actual travelling time from Esmeralda had been fourteen "days" averaging about twenty hours —for I travelled all night as well as all day—which, considering delay at the cataracts, was excellent going, and indicates the speed of the Flowing Road.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVI

SITTING UP FOR EL TIGRE

Sprawled along the west bank of the largest lake in South America, Maracaibo offers little in the way of looks, but it has a warm heart and courtesy and manners. At least, so I found it, and I cannot regard myself an exception in the rule of the town's conduct to the stranger within her gates. No; it's the way of the people; and when one travels a land where politeness is a habit and hospitality the first thought, the inconveniences of laggard progress appear inconsequential. It's an old, old town, this Maracaibo, established far back in the sixteenth century (1529), and bearing the added distinction of having been sacked by that industrious buccaneer, Henry Morgan, in the seventeenth. Nearer our day, it paid exhausting tribute to another freebooter, the notorious Castro, whose methods, if modern rather than picturesque, were none the less thorough and calamitous.

There is every natural reason why Venezuela in general, and the country round about Maracaibo in particular, should tempt any filibuster, for with its cocoanuts, its sugar, its cacao, its coffee, its divi-divi and copaiba, not to mention the bananas of which it sent forth eleven million bunches the year of my visit, the treasury of the state should be overflowing. But this is reckoning without Castro, the vainglorious though cunning upstart, who, during his reign, laid so heavy and blighting a hand upon the country's

Digitized by Google

prosperity none dared to invest or to develop lest the grasping attention of the president be attracted. Monopoly, with this pirate in the background, controlled the commonest necessities—salt, matches, cattle; blackmail ruled, levied by enough favoured political parasites to wreck any country; while the dank dungeon, San Carlos, at mouth of the harbour, frowned portentous warning to those who thought to uphold their rights.

Squeezed by Castro, bullied by his henchmen, and threatened by revolution, Maracaibo has begun to live only since this avaricious vandal was cast out. Poor, tax-ridden Venezuela! first in natural wealth among South American countries and the least developed. Perhaps now, under more honest and enlightened administration, she may fulfil the destiny preordained by a wider, richer potentiality than that of any of her sister republics.

As I found it, the city on the Lake afforded excellent business opportunities for several large exporting houses and enough trade to keep the forty-five or fifty thousand people agreeably occupied. And that's about as much as Maracaibo wants, high or low. With the average native able to get along comfortably on about ten cents a day, no very serious effort is necessary; and truth to tell, no serious desire for hard work is manifest in that hot region where the noon siesta lasts late and the cool of the adobe invites to relaxation. In common with all South America, the Moorish architecture prevails, with its low, flat-top houses, its barred windows and its alluring pátio or open inner courtyard of flowers and refreshing green—in Chile and

Digitized by Google

the Argentine, this pátio becomes a charming resort and a bower of beauty to catch the eye of the passer who spies it through the open door or gateway. Despite its considerable population and commercial importance, however, Maracaibo is beyond the zone of the tourist postcard and its one hotel was unendurable. But my stay in town while outfitting was made delightful through the kindness of Franz Müller, who placed his attractive Lake estate (including a pet tiger-cat) and its servants at my disposal.

It was not, however, to look upon its commercial side that I went to the Maracaibo section of Venezuela, but to explore its Lake country and to hunt the jaguar, reported to be plentifully distributed on its borders and along its rivers. A good friend at Caracas had given me a letter to a grizzled old warrior, Gen. B. Tinedo Velasco, depicting him as a hunter of long local experience and a sportsman of the first quality; and from the time I met him first until I reluctantly bade him adios, there was no hour in the day in which he did not amply justify that opinion. He was of the old school, the General, gentle of heart, soft of speech, courtly in manner, prone to suffer inconvenience rather than miss opportunity for a kindly word or act, and yet a fighter withal who had proved his courageous spirit and valiant heart to the dismay of his foes through several lively campaigns.

Together we organized our party while the friends of the General and those who had heard our project, quickly noised about, came to advise and to tell us stories of the fury of the "tigre," as the jaguar is called. Every night we gathered under the Gen-

Digitized by Google

eral's hospitable roof to hear the tales, apparently inexhaustible, for every ranch making down to the Lake or having river frontage contributed its quota. Most of the reports of encounters were vague and imaginative and not unlike what I had heard so far away as the Argentine, but at least one yarn was novel and interesting. It told of a dog that, on being chased in the night by a jaguar, crawled under the mosquito netting enveloping the camp bed of its master, where it remained unmolested by el tigre, which had stopped short of the netting, nosing it suspiciously but going no farther, although the cowering dog was not a foot beyond! The beast was finally frightened away by the shouts of the awakened and astonished man.

Certainly el tigre is a prolific theme at any gathering near the jungle land of South America, nor are authenticated instances wanting of its unquestionable ferocity when cornered, but the trustworthy consensus, as I have found it from Mexico to the Argentine, added to my own experience, maintains that it rarely makes an unprovoked attack on man. Its especial fondness on the borders of a settlement is for dogs and pigs, and in the wilderness peccaries, tapir, the agouti and other members of that multitudinous rat family likewise afford an abundant and assorted menu; also it is fond of fish, for which it "angles" industriously and successfully.

Jaguar size and species appear to create as much debate as their disposition. Over all its wide range from Mexico, through Central America and to almost the southernmost end of South America, the jaguar varies in temper and size according to season, food

Digitized by Google

CROSSING THE LLANOS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

supply, environment—and the imagination of the beholder. The average native is apt to report three or four species, and the many highly coloured and fantastic books and articles on animal life in the jungles repeatedly finding their way into print are even less reliable. All jungle cat variants are called tigre by the people: tigre of the forest, tigre of the caves, tigre of the llanos, much to the confusion of the casual hunter. My observation and travel convince me that the *felis* family is represented in South America by (1) jaguar (*Felis onca*), heaviest and most powerful of the family next to the tiger, having a similar tawny pelt, marked with black rosettes instead of black stripes; (2) by the puma (*Felis concolor*), incorrectly called panther (*Felis pardus*), and lighter in structure than its North American cougar or mountain lion relative, but darker in color; (3) by the ocelot (*Felis pardalis*), a smaller leopard-like creature, with beautiful black markings; and (4) by several sizes and colourations of cats, from the dimensions of our unlovely United States wild- or bobcat to a pretty, vicious thing about the size of a domestic cat handsomely striped in black on dark gray; and all of them long tailed.

I found much variation in the depth of the body colour of the jaguar pelt and in the size and lustre of the rosettes, and incline to the belief that this changeableness is due not to variation of species, but to influence of range and health of the animal. The hides of the jaguars I killed and saw coming from the llanos were of a lighter shade than those from the more heavily forested sections. On the upper Orinoco the Indians claim a black jaguar, and have thus

Digitized by Google

misled two very distinguished travellers—Humboldt and Wallace, no less—as well as a number of lesser lights, one of whom, named Smith, goes so far in his book on Amazon travel as to not only credit the local fiction, but to give it name, *F. nigra!* Wallace records shooting one on the crossing from Pimichin to Javita on the neck of land which projects between the upper Rio Negro and the Atabapo, and appears to accept the Indian statement. But in my more extended travel over this section, especially in the north, where the animal is reported abundant, I learned nothing to warrant a revision of natural history. The black jaguar, like the black leopard or panther of the Far East, is a melanic accident, a freak, no more, no less, just as a black or a silver is, in the first instance, a freak of the red fox.* It corresponds to the occasional albino among animal kind. To accept the black jaguar is to fall a victim to local tradition.

It appeared to be quite generally the opinion at the General's that when eating a kill the jaguar is invariably dangerous to approach. But only the largest of them prey upon cattle, and much of the terror attaching to the name of el tigre must be accounted for by the impressive havoc he creates when he does attack; for at full strength he is, indeed, a

* Repeated breeding of freaks may result in establishing a distinct class just as we have the "fancy" in pigeons and dogs. For instance, in Canada an effort has been making to breed silver foxes for the market by persistently mating the freaks, and one man after long and sustained experimenting appears to have succeeded. But outside some of our up-to-date "nature" books, eugenics is not yet recognized among the four-footed jungle folk.

Digitized by Google

powerful beast, second by only a little to his more royal brother, the real tiger of the East. Like the wolf and the cougar, the jaguar sometimes displays the curiosity to follow without thought of attack, and once one came into my night camp without harming a thing or arousing any of us—evidently prowling for food. The smaller fry of the *felis* family which are so lucky as to be established near settlements victimize the local poultry; at times a single ocelot or cat will wantonly kill hundreds of chickens at one visit, carrying off a few to apparently do naught else than suck their blood. The largest jaguar of which I ever heard was at one of these gatherings at the General's. Its body measurement was 6 feet 9 inches in length, 28 inches in height, with a tail of three feet. The largest of five shot by me measured 7 feet 8 inches from nose tip to tail end.

Although the range of the jaguar is wide, the areas where he can be hunted with intelligent direction or a fair chance of success are comparatively restricted; confined, in a word, to the more open sections where he may be chased with dogs, or to those districts where, in the dry season, water-holes are few and far between. In the open spots of Mexico and Central America, on the llanos edges of Venezuela and on the borders of the Argentine Gran Chaco, dogs are employed, and the jaguar in such a country always takes to a tree to await the arrival of the man with the gun, who has only to walk up and pot him in the same manner that some hunt the cougar.

I confess I fail to find sport in such target practice on any creature, from raccoon to cougar, which has taken refuge up a tree and thus awaits me unable

Digitized by Google

to escape. Nor is there much more sport in sitting up assassin-like over a water-hole, perhaps the only one in the region, to shoot down the beast when it comes to slake its thirst. The only excuse for killing under such unfair conditions is either for purpose of ridding a locality of its pests, or of securing examples for scientific purposes. On the other hand, fair stalking of the jaguar or of any of the *felis* family but the lion, which lives in the open country, is, except on rare and unusual occasions, an impossibility on account of the jungle of its habitat and nature of the beast, which is a skulker. In the dense cover of the forest along the Road, if ever you see a jaguar it's by merest chance of coming on to him noiselessly and unexpectedly. To hunt el tigre in such a country is out of the question. The Indians of the wilderness give him a wide berth, if on occasion they come on his trail, for their arrows are poor defence against so powerful and active an animal. Moreover, the Indian is not wasting precious arrow points on anything not edible.

While being regaled thus in the evenings by the local raconteurs, preparations for our expedition were going forward during the day at good rate. Within a week everything was ready for the start—provisions stoutly sacked and labelled and grouped in fifty-pound lots, the better to fit into the pack hampers borne by the burros—each man carrying his own duffle or personal luggage rolled inside his hammock and so tied on behind his saddle. Two articles of the personal luggage, viz., the alpargatas and the chinchorro (hammock), are worthy of comment as being

Digitized by Google

the two things without which the equipment of any traveller in Venezuela is incomplete.

The alpargata is the common shoe of the people, a kind of sandal with a leather sole and a cloth toe which extends a narrow band around the heel to hold it firmly on the foot; in the back country the sole is made of aloe fibres. They are indispensable in camp for those unaccustomed to going barefooted, especially in a tropical country, and of such utility that I am never without a pair. They are not handsome, but as a lounge and camp slipper they are indeed serviceable.

On the lower Orinoco, the native-made hammocks are of the moriche palm fibre, elsewhere, on the upper Orinoco, the alto Rio Negro and some of its branches, long and tough textile grasses furnish the strands. Some are real works of art, beautifully woven and decorated with bird plumage; but these are far from the markets and difficult to secure, as they are made for individual use and not to sell. One I succeeded in getting on the Negro is not ornamented, but I have never seen so fine a bit of hammock weaving. Really, it's too closely woven for cool sleeping in hot weather. It might almost be compared to the exquisite handiwork revealed in those fine hats called "Panama," which are not and never were made on the Isthmus, but in Peru and Ecuador, where grow the palms that supply the fine and enduring straw of which they are woven.*

It was a part of the General's scheme that we

---

* Attempts are making to manufacture these hats on the Isthmus by importing the straw and workers, but except in coarser kinds, with no marked success at this writing.

Digitized by Google

should await the coming of the new moon, so as to adopt the infinitely more comfortable idea of accomplishing our longest stretches of travel by night instead of by day; as well as to improve our chances of securing game—sitting up at night over water-holes being his plan for the hunting campaign. So it was another week after we were ready before we actually set out for the llanos across the Lake. These llanos of Venezuela in being more or less watered and wooded differ from those other great plains of South America, the pampas of the Argentine, which stretch away to the horizon as far as the eye can see, flat and treeless for the most part. From directly back of the mountain range which skirts practically all the north coast of Venezuela, down to the Orinoco and the Apure rivers, and west to Lake Maracaibo, they extend broken only by Cordillera spurs that well nigh encircle Barquisimeto before losing identity in the great Andes, where it terminates to the south of the Lake.

There are, so it is officially claimed, almost four or five hundred rivers flowing into the one-hundred-and-twenty-five-mile, bottle-shaped Lake Maracaibo, whose shores at the neck on the north are separated in places by no more than seven miles, and on the south by as much as eighty. Near one of these rivers we landed on the east where a fringe of those tropic first-aids to beauty, the cocoa-nut palm, half concealed and wholly glorified some scattering houses picturesquely distributed in the half-lights among the trees in the background. Closer view, however, dispelled the illusion and uncovered half a dozen thatched huts of simplest construction. It was a little Indian settlement of the kind common to the lagoons and the

Digitized by Google

bays and the rivers of Venezuela, which grow a small quantity of "yucca brava" (the manna of South America, and in such respect a correlative of the East Indian sago plant), do a little fishing and much talking and smoking.

We came near to drowning several of our pack animals in the landing and so sustaining a serious delay at the very outset. Rather a rough sea was running, lifting the shallow steam-kettle boat high to smack her down again violently so that burros and horses were tossed about in disordered alarm, and naturally much confused when prematurely thrown overboard by the unintelligent captain for the purpose of swimming them ashore. Instead of heading inshore, some of them headed out, while a burro circled and circled, the waves breaking over his head as he sank so his nose alone was visible. Only prompt action in sending out canoes saved this little burden bearer as well as two or three of the horses; yet apparently the experience did them no harm. Starting a few hours later, that selfsame burro covered forty-seven miles from two o'clock until midnight without food and practically without rest, also without water until noon of the day following, carrying both pack baskets full and behind them one of the party who certainly weighed all of one hundred and thirty or one hundred and forty pounds!

For three days we made our way back across the llanos, maintaining a good average of pace, as our mounts were of that excellent thirteen to fourteen-hand bronco type native to Venezuela, which has a fox trot that eats up distance and is easy on the rider. Curiously, the Venezuelans do not appear to appreciate

Digitized by Google

the advantage of a hard, smooth saddle surface for long, arduous riding. There is no gainsaying their endurance, however, for they ride day in and day out and ride well, on a saddle somewhat of the English tree order, with a blanket or cloth or sheepskin belted a-top of it after the fashion of that much-overrated horseman—the Argentine gaucho. Our long rest we took at noon, and for the balance of the twenty-four hours kept on the trail—mornings, late afternoons and far into the night. When the moon went down, the General got out lanterns and kept on going; and this was in late January, before the beginning of the seasonal rains when everything is shrivelled and noisy and awry.

Though the high lights and the contorted vines and the crackling brush gave a novel and, therefore, agreeable vista, yet they parched the throat and switched the face as we filed in and among the crooked and creaking dead timber which swayed ominously in every coppice we struggled through. How many times we stopped to readjust the packs in this tanglewood! For the longer time, however, we wound over the llanos, dusty grass and cactus covered plains, now cutting through a bit of tearing, slapping, noisy jungle, now circling an island of small-tree groups in a sea of scorched vegetation, and again passing under some high-standing solitary tree giant, bearing strange-shaped pods and often covered with brilliant parasitic flower growth. Two of these especially attracted me as I rode. One bore a rough bark forming great elongated diamond sections, from whose branches hung long, pod-like pendants and a yellow flower. The other was not over thirty or

Digitized by Google

GETTING THE PACKS TOGETHER

THE WATER CARRIER

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

forty feet in height with a trunk tapering rapidly from about two feet in diameter at the base to not over six inches. Another very tall tree raised an umbrella-like top almost completely covered with little blue flowers; and once in a while we came to the wide-spreading, handsome ceiba, each with its abnormal clinging growths, for every tree has its particular parasite. Of the cactus, too, there were many, and one had a bristling trunk with prickly arms placed much like the cross-bars of a telegraph pole.

Always with us were the parrakeets that build their mud nests in trees and are forever screeching, besides many other birds more agreeable, though doves of two sizes predominated. Often I saw at work an industrious woodpecker, carpenter of the woods, as the natives call him, with his red top busily hammering a tattoo which the dry condition of wood and the quiet of the air carried far. At night, we frequently heard the crashing of the plucky little peccaries, sweeping past our column in hurried flight.

So we pursued our course, cutting across savannahs, filing through thickets, winding over and round little mounts and open parks, often coming to soil quite sandy; travelling ever as though in a sunken territory, with only an occasional vista ahead.

Finally, when the General pulled up at what he declared to be our first camp, we were in what looked like a one-time river bottom, now entirely covered with small trees and brush, here and there one of good size, but not too dense to prevent seeing a fair distance. Beyond could be seen "the monte" (wooded upland), which is the beginning of the foothills that reach back into the mountains to the east.

Digitized by Google

It was a confined, closed-in sort of camping ground, and seemed to suggest floodland, insects and jaguars; the General, in fact, assured me it was a famous rendezvous for the last two and the General's judgment was rarely at fault.

As I have said, the entire country was dried up, with no running streams, and every living thing compelled to come to the pools of standing water sparingly distributed. These were little else than mud holes, ranging in size from a dozen feet or so to one I sat by long and often that was a good one hundred feet long and twenty to thirty feet wide. Such as they were, these holes supplied the drinking water not only for the birds and the beasts, but for us as well.

The outlined scheme of our hunting prescribed looking for tracks by day, and watching by night at the water-hole to which they led; and after a thorough reconnaissance of the surrounding country, opinion seemed unanimous that we were favourably located for a successful trial. Accompanied by one of the men to cut loose the barbed bush things which entangled our feet and ensnared our clothing, the General and Alberto, his son, a fine lad, set out next day in the late afternoon, each with a hammock and a gourd of yellow water. Alberto was after meat rather than a trophy, so we left him up a tree which grows a sweetish, plum-like fruit the deer are very fond of, and trudged on till we came to a rather large water-hole, where one of the scouts claimed to have found jaguar spoor, though incidentally I could not see it on arrival.

In the Far East, when you sit up for tiger over a kill or a bait or a water-hole, even the meanest

Digitized by Google

platform or staging upon which you await is something of a structure, while the elaborate "mecham" of India is almost an architectural creation; but in South America simplicity rules. Merely you take to a tree, and in a small hammock, which is really nothing more than a broad sling made especially for the purpose, you compose yourself for the denouement of the venture. There are serious faults in the South American method. The hammock does not make a steady shooting platform, the dangling legs get benumbed and the position is strained and uncomfortable; or, if you lie in the hammock, you have some difficulty in the last long and silent hours of watching to keep from being lulled by its gentle rocking to that bourne of the *dolce far niente* whence no hunter returns—unashamed.

Using the dishevelled roots of an upturned tree as a step-ladder, the General and I swung our hammock seats about ten feet above ground to stout bamboo at the edge of a considerable clump where they rattled in the breeze, as is the way of the tough and useful bamboo, not over twenty feet from the waterhole. Here, gently swaying as the air stirred our vibrant supports, or checking the movement with cautious hand every once in a while as the agitation grew to violence, we strained eye and ear for jaguar sign from about five in the afternoon until a couple of hours past midnight. But no "tigre" put in an appearance; yet, as a first night vigil in such country there was plenty to see so long as the light lasted.

For me there is no experience so fascinating as that provided for the watcher near a dry season waterhole during the twilight hours. Such a variety of

Digitized by Google

wild life on the bank, and such a collection of noises as come up out of the forest round you; the groaning trees; the hoarse quoking of herons, sometimes intermingled with the roaring bellow of the monkey howler. The birds begin to assemble as the sun goes down; doves in groups curtsey to the dirty water and raise a thankful head at each libation; small herons stand dejected and watchful; a beautifully tinted rosy spoonbill explores the muck; stilt and rail-like birds dart busily hither and thither; a brown-red gallinule with pert black little tail industriously picks his way entirely around the edge of the hole, utterly oblivious to the active and somewhat noisy life round about. Now and then the deep croak of the great heron is heard as it flies overhead or, in nearby tree, sounds its raucous note. If you look sharp you'll see, like as not, just as dusk is coming on, a small band of the black-bodied and feathery topknotted "paujil" (curassow) stealing forth with stilted step and bobbing head, perhaps occasionally exploding a disproportionately small whistle, on the way to its post-prandial drink.

As dusk draws closer, the birds, except for the ugly heron, silently withdraw, and small animal life begins to show. A black squirrel (a beauty I never saw out of Venezuela) comes jerkily upon the scene; the always-present rodents are represented by a brownish creature which noses along, sitting up once in a while like a prairie-dog to safeguard against overt attack; a deer, sometimes two or even three, will suddenly stand before you across the hole, and you wonder how that large, beautiful thing could have appeared without your hearing until you note enrap-

Digitized by Google

tured its absolutely silent and dainty approach to the water—ears sounding the air like alert semaphores, the great eyes shining in their liquid beauty. As it stands, a listening, exquisitely modelled image, with nose reaching forward inquiringly, a small herd of the ever-moving, ever-bustling peccaries goes scampering by rattling the dry brush as though under a cavalry charge—and you tingle with admiration at the marvellous scent of the deer, which, unperturbed by the sound, knows it for that of no enemy and awaits its passing unafraid.

For a while after the tropical night has drawn its curtain upon the scene, new forms stand out before your tense eyes, mostly the creatures of your fancy, for the wild denizens have gone their various ways. Perhaps, as you stare, once in a while a pair of glowing orbs loom suddenly in the darkness like the magic picture of the lantern materializing out of space; and your grasp tightens on the rifle in thought that maybe at last your victim has arrived. But it is only one of the smaller cat tribe come for its belated drink, or to prowl the jungle lest perchance some unwary agouti may recklessly have strayed from its hole, or a foolish paujil delayed its roosting to furnish toothsome meal for an active, lustful member of the *felis* family. At last all the jungle world seems sleeping, save the insects, and you sway gently in the breeze among the creaking bamboo, with ear cocking at every other sound and skin writhing under the insect attack, which you dare not repel too energetically.

Now it is when night has really settled that the senses concentrate in wary fixity to detect the stealthy

Digitized by Google

approach of your quarry. With the close of day, in a word, you cease to be the absorbed student of wild life going about its business unconsciously before you, and become an animal of destruction. It is no longer sport; it is now merely the getting of a trophy—no less; and only the discomfort and the heavy odds and the remoteness make the game but a trifle more sporting than shooting deer or boar driven up to your very feet, or calling moose, or slaughtering swimming deer.

The blank night was frankly disappointing to us all, since evidence of jaguar had been so generously reported, yet we remained in this camp several days more, sitting up as before over different water-holes, but always with no better result. And when we had exhausted the nearby drinking places, and our own patience, we moved to another camp about a day off, in a similar piece of country. Here we scoured the surroundings for tracks, the scouts reporting them plentiful, though, as before, I saw none fresh, which, however, did not argue the men mistaken, because the ground, hard and dry as a bone, was neither retentive of footprints nor dependable as to their age. Hope springs eternal in the hunter's breast, so again we took up our nightly vigil for the tigre which refused to come. If we failed of success it was not for lack of industry. Astir at daylight, we tracked until about ten, returning then to camp to eat and sleep until four in the afternoon, when each went his separate way with hammock and gourd for the night watch.

The gourd merits a chapter to itself. In whole it is the country canteen, and with its top section removed becomes the ubiquitous catch-all and serve-all

Digitized by Google

A WATER-HOLE

THIS IS TYPICAL OF THE KIND WHERE WE SAT UP FOR JAGUAR AND FROM WHICH WE TOOK OUR DRINKING WATER. IT WAS AT THIS PARTICULAR ONE, ALSO, THAT I SCRAPED ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE CROCODILE

DURING THE HEAT OF THE DAY WE LOAFED—GENERAL TINEDO STANDING BY THE TREE

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

utensil of the country household, the common size ranging between a large cup and a medium bowl. In Brazil it is called cuia and decorated with elaborate but pleasing and indelible designs; in Venezuela it is calabash and mostly unadorned. They grow on a low (fifteen feet), wide-spreading tree, attached in considerable numbers to the limb where it is heavy and leafless. We were well supplied with this native water bottle, in all sizes and shapes, and to see Saturno returning from the water-hole was a sight equalled only by the itinerant tinsmith of Rio Janeiro, who carries on his head and body every pan conceivably of use in the kitchen. Saturno was our cook, a thin, gray-bearded, oldish chap, whose only garment, made out of a sack, hung from his waist to his knees. He was always good-natured, constantly suspending his work at the camp-fire to look for garrapatas, that charter member of South America's trinity of insect devils—pium, zancudo, garrapata.

By now I had become fully acquainted with this trio. Known to Central America and Mexico as the red-bug, the garrapata is the tick of Venezuela, and breeds in four sizes of malignance; the largest as large as a full grown bedbug, the smallest little bigger than a pen point. These in all their sizes infest the brush and the grass. The low branches that sweep your hat as you ride, the bush that drags across your legs in the saddle, the grass through which you walk, the log upon which you rest, each and sundry, as the idiom goes, supplies its quota of swarming, biting garrapatas. And the smallest is the arch fiend of the lot, for not only is it so tiny as to be all but invisible, but it burrows into your skin immediately upon contact.

Digitized by Google

Hunting garrapatas was quite as much a business of the day as was watching for jaguar by night. On returning to the camp every man went at once to the fire, where, divesting himself of all clothing, he held the different articles over the flames to loosen the grip of the insect so it might be shaken off—the shirt being turned inside out for this especial purification. Then standing nude, search for those on his body would be instituted by a fellow sufferer, whose back in turn he explored later. The General brought relief to many a companion and earned a memorial from tortured dry season jungle travellers in Venezuela, by discovering that beeswax applied to the garrapata ere he quite disappears under the skin, lifts him from his prey; hence everyone in camp was provided with a ball of beeswax, which he rolled over as much of his anatomy as he could reach, while another curried his back.

It's easy to recognize the fever mosquito if you can see it, because instead of alighting on its feet like other respectable fly things, including its harmless relative, it stands on its head when settling upon you. The impossibility of knowing as you sit in the dark over the stagnant water-hole—a prolific breeder—whether the insect getting into action on your neck is standing sedately on its feet or disreputably on its head adds to the diverting experiences of certain bits of jungle. There is, however, always the comforting thought that the farther you are from town, the less is the likelihood of its depositing the yellow fever germ, but that isn't to say you may not get one of the dozen varieties of malarial fever. The speculation always reminded me of the unfailing method I once

Digitized by Google

heard a witty after-dinner speaker suggest by which the delicious mushroom can be certainly distinguished from the deadly toadstool; "if it's a mushroom," he said, "you live; if a toadstool, you die." Of ants, too, we had a plenty—a yellow one three-fourths of an inch long such as I had not before seen, a black one about one-half inch in length, with a small red spot back of its head; and both of them bit like fury. Another quite small ant with white belly is entirely harmless to man, but very destructive to trees and buildings. I have seen tree trunks and house timbers so grooved and honeycombed as to be on the verge of collapse. Think of the industry of an insect a quarter-inch long that will thus tunnel a six-inch post.

The day came round after several more blank nights when we left this camp and moved to another, still in a country of the same general character. This time we thought we certainly had found the long-sought-for tracks; some of them, quite fresh, were to be seen at two different water-holes. To double our chances of success, the General and I watched over different holes, each where the tracks were visible; but the General neither heard nor saw anything suggestive of jaguar, and the nearest I came to good fortune was a momentary view of two large fire balls, seemingly too large to belong to any other of the family, which vanished while I stretched out a hand to steady my swaying hammock.

But I did have an unusual view of the curassow, the bird with grouse flavoured flesh, which is scattered all along the Flowing Road and in Venezuela is known as paujil. It has a body about the size of a small turkey, short legs and a large feathery crest

Digitized by Google

which shows whitish on the females when raised and black on the males, who, in addition, have a yellow knob at base of the black beak. Six of these birds on this particular night paraded before me for a quarter of an hour, strutting down from cover to the water and occasionally making their call, that is not unlike certain turkey notes. It is a shy bird, roosts high up in the trees, and keeps to the close growing bush where the berries upon which it feeds grow. I sat up three nights especially for the purpose of watching the paujil, taking my camera in the hope of being able to secure some photographs, but though the birds performed, the light was too weak, and nothing resulted on the films. Many a time I tried to photograph a water-hole scene, but never with any success, for lack of light. One bird grew quite friendly as my visits multiplied, a prettily marked, chipper little fellow about the size of a sparrow, with yellow breast, brown wings, black strip to the eye and a white band circling round a brown topknot. It seemed greatly interested in my proceedings, perching quite near to regard me with frank curiosity as it flicked from branch to branch.

We played hide and seek with the jaguar in this section—there being more drinking holes than we could cover at one sitting. Once I saw dimly his outline in the deep dusk as he slunk off to one side to leave me on the very edge of unrealized expectations the remainder of the night; and frequently I saw to good advantage the smaller members of the *felis* group. But the tigre gave me no opportunity for shooting. If it hadn't been for the fascinating scenes of wild life at sunset I'd have grown much bored,

Digitized by Google

for at its best I was none too enamoured of this unsporting method of getting a trophy. Every day offered some new interest and none more amusing than an acquaintance I struck up with a crocodile in the pool near camp which supplied our drinking water. This was an oval-shaped pond, about fifty to sixty feet long and thirty feet wide, to which I had journeyed several times without seeing any large life in it when I searched the water with a stick before reaching down to fill the gourd by aid of which I made my ablutions on the bank. One day, as I stooped with my gourd, I glimpsed the end of a snout and two glassy eyes staring at me about twenty feet off; and so we remained for minutes, regarding each other—I careful to make no sudden move.

Let me interpolate here for the benefit of those desirous of studying wild life, never to approach abruptly or make sudden movements of any kind, for the sake of safety as well as for the sake of observation. I am convinced that three-quarters of the time a beast charges or a snake attacks, fear of you rather than aggression is the compelling impulse; the creature acts in a spirit of self-defence.

While we, the croc. and I, stared motionless at one another, many little creatures came forth furtively—lizards, great spiders, a long-necked tortoise; it is nothing less than amazing what an amount of life you will see in the jungle if you simply remain still and watch. On this day of our introduction, the croc. disappeared noiselessly the instant I arose from my squatting position, but before moving camp we grew to such terms of friendliness that he would remain on the surface an apparently interested spec-

Digitized by Google

tator of my bath. No doubt had he recognized in me a disciple of the new nature school, he'd forthwith have confided his woes over the restricted hunting field and how he happened in that pond, and why he wasn't holed up in his dry season slumber like the majority of well-regulated crocs. in country such as this, instead of frivolling with an inquisitive wanderer.

Perhaps he was, indeed, so minded when once or twice he suddenly sank from view in the middle of the pool as I stooped, dipping water at the edge, but if so I fear I did not encourage his advances as should a true interpreter of wild life, for on such occasions I always stepped back from the muddy waters to the top of the bank. All of which prompts another suggestion to those who would adventure among tropical jungles—if you would not be a candidate for the "though-lost-to-sight-to-memory-dear class," locate the spot where the croc. of the pool or the river bank is or is not before you stretch your arm to dip up water; so long as you've got your eye on him you needn't fear the crocodile, but keep a sharp watch when he goes out of sight in dirty water.

They say washing in the water of these mud-holes is likely to give you fever, but I simply had to take a chance; I was too uncomfortably in need of a bath. Walking in such a country at such a season is soiling business. It was as drink that the water really offended. Of course, we filtered and boiled and charged it heavily with lemon or orange and sugar—anything to destroy its natural flavour. The General had taught Saturno to make quite a palatable orangeade kind of drink upon which we came to rely. In parenthesis I will add that except for the real wil-

Digitized by Google

derness lover, or one glad to pay heavily in bodily discomfort for the chance to observe strange wild life, there is no delight in such tropical camping.

After more days of fruitless searching and nights of patient watching, we abandoned sitting up over water-holes and the section which, promising so much had yielded so little, and journeyed into a region where the General said a tigre lived in caves. This proved rather an attractive bit of country with open spots scattered in the forest further broken by little wooded hills and shallow gullies.

Here we had finally the most comfortable camp of our trip and I was much amused at the process of evolution. On the day of arrival we simply dumped everything in the sand; sweeping much of the brush away and burning over the ground to kill the insects being the only camping preparations made. The next day a canvas fly was set over our hammocks; the third day another one covered the culinary department and Saturno; two days later a rack for the dishes was made, and a few days before breaking camp a stationary dining table and benches were constructed of lashed poles set upon crotched uprights.

In caves which were really enlarged burrows opening into the gullies, the tigre was reported to have its abode, and plenty of tracks were plainly visible here where the soil was yielding. At several of the caves our solitary dog sniffed suspiciously and occasionally whined affrightedly, backing away and stubbornly refusing to be brought up to the work of investigation; but beyond such signs our four days' efforts resulted in no more here than at the water-holes. I tried building fires at the mouths of the

Digitized by Google

caves where the tracks were freshest, but if there was tigre he was smoke proof. Only an occasional cave was large enough for me to enter with any freedom of movement, and such as I explored on hands and knees, thrusting a burning brand before me, yielded neither sight nor sound of jaguar. Yet glowing reports continued to be brought daily into camp by the deer hunters, who kept us easily in more meat than we could eat of a smallish white tail with face like the moluccan and a sporting pair of antlers rather heavy for their spread. Only the General and I clung steadfastly to pursuit of the elusive jaguar, going out by dawn and by night.

Each hunter's return was signal for the gathering of all in camp to hear his dramatic recital given to its minutest detail. Invariably tigre played a leading rôle. One hunter had found the dead carcass of a tapir (long dead, I discovered next day); another heard tigre gnashing its teeth! another had remained in his tree fearful lest the tigre he heard growling nearby should get him! Scarcely a man returned to camp but what was sure he had heard either the tigre or the "lione," as they called the puma.

A few days more of this unrequited casting convinced me that however many jaguar might roam the country at other times, to seek farther in the dry season was wasting time—a conclusion supported by our having found not one tigre-killed deer. Therefore, wishing to get down the Apure River before the rains began, I suggested returning, and the General agreeing, we broke camp instanter. I truly believe the dear old man, who always called me Don Gaspar, had endured the discomfort of these many days more

Digitized by Google

ALBERTO AND REGULO BRINGING IN A DEER

THE SIMPLE HOUSE OF THE VENEZUELAN LLANERO

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

from a sense of courtesy than because he derived pleasure. Not that he failed to enjoy the hunting, for he did, like the hale old man he was, that at sixty-eight could not be outridden by any of us on the hard, continuous marching, or outstayed on the uncomfortable tree hammock.

Our return road, travelled chiefly at night as before, took us into a new country to the eastward, partly through pieces of forest and jungle and partly across the llanos. Near occasional outcroppings of malpais-like rock we saw a fibrous giant of a pine-apple kind of plant, six to eight feet high and with a spread of over twelve to fifteen feet, which, the General said, supplies the Indian with his native thread. The country was dry as punk, and as we rode, the clatter of the bamboo swinging to the wind rose above all sounds save that made by the leather-lunged "guacharaca," a bird which runs a scale having a top note quite unparalleled except by the calliope. But I shall remember longest the "rosa de monte," a brilliant flower the General pointed out to me on the hillside which opened to reveal vivid scarlet leaves veined in lighter crimson and a white fringed petal bending outward from the centre.

Drawing near the Lake we came to several small ranchos—humblest of human habitations—consisting of four upright poles supporting a palm-thatched roof. Sometimes these crude abodes have sides, as often they are open, and some I passed at another time on the llanos from Valencia to the Apure were cruder still. Here live the llaneros, a contented lot, as a whole, who tend the cattle and know no greater luxury than an occasional meat and vegetable stew

Digitized by Google

called "sancocho" in Venezuela and "puchero" in Argentine, where it is a favourite of the gauchos. At one of these ranchos, the mother of several naked, playing kiddies could not tell me her age; with her mouth shut she looked twenty, but any age with it open, for she had lost all her upper front teeth! Nothing could be simpler than the domestic economy of such ranchos; hammocks are the beds, gourds and cocoanut shells the utensils, and all outdoors a dumping ground. The only decorative thing I saw was a vine-made cage holding a bright and talkative member of the oriole family, which was so tame the woman could handle it.

Thus, stopping here and there to note some bird or plant or tree, we came to the Lake again. So far as concerned el tigre the trip was a failure, but it was none the less interesting and well worth while if only for the pleasure of the General's companionship.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVII

DOWN THE PORTUGUESA

Our failure to dislodge jaguar in the easterly Lake country appeared to bother the General a whole lot more than it did me, and on our return to Maracaibo he set inquiry afoot as to prospects on the west side, securing information no more encouraging than that the section from which we had just returned was considered second to none for such game. Of course I had no thought of giving up without another try in north Venezuela, and having heard of the Portuguesa River as a territory much favoured by el tigre, decided on descending that way to the lower Orinoco instead of again crossing the llanos from Cagua as I had planned. Thus resolved, I arrived, in due course of steamer and railway travel, at Barquisimeto, connected with Tucacas at the sea by a short railroad.

Here I had no difficulty whatever in assembling my simple equipment, or in securing the two horses which were to carry me and Chavez, the native picked up where I bought the animals, as well as the small outfit of supplies divided between us and stowed in the saddle bags.

Like her sister towns, Maracaibo and Valencia, Barquisimeto came into life about the middle of the sixteenth century. Unlike either of the others, however, she sits upon a plateau facing the ridge which divides the streams flowing into Lake Maracaibo on the west from those emptying on the south—finally

Digitized by Google

into the Apure—that northerly division of the Road whose branches reach like veins throughout all this western section. With a little valley at its feet, nearby the enveloping mountains—whence comes much of the raw material for its special industry of hammock and rope manufacture—Barquisimeto appeared about the busiest of Venezuelan towns, and the coolest barring Caracas. Maracaibo does not rank in the comparative cool class: always it is hot in the village by the Lake.

There are two ways of reaching the Portuguesa from the north—(1) by rail to Valencia from Puerto Cabello, thence by saddle across the llanos to San Carlos and so on south to San Rafael; or (2) from Tucacas on the sea by rail to Barquisimeto and so by horse through an opening in the hills to Cojedes, just below San Carlos. I chose the latter route, probably also the longer, having already, in a previous year, made a ten-day crossing of the plains, horseback through Calabozo, its midway metropolis, to San Fernando de Apure.

It's an attractive ride from Barquisimeto through el Altar to the Cojedes, a shallow river about one hundred feet wide, easily forded as I saw it, but which swells to considerable of a stream after the rains. We were three days on the journey that need not consume half so much time if you keep going, for it is little over forty miles; but I loitered along the road, spending half a day where the pass winds through the small Cordillera trying to get a good look at a "campanero," or bell bird, whose abrupt metallic call sounded high and loud in the adjoining forest. Unlike the Venezuelan variant of the oriole, the cam-

Digitized by Google

panero shuns the settlements and lives entirely on the forest edge, where he is prone to seek the top of a tall tree, from which he sends his ringing note repeatedly. Whenever I heard it, mostly on the lower Orinoco, the bird was fairly close, but the volume and penetrating clearness of the note led me to believe that it will carry a mile under favourable atmospheric conditions in the jungle. I never saw a campanero in captivity or heard of one being killed, as the bird is a great favourite with the natives, who make astonishing claims for the carrying power of its bell.

The little river we left at the pass, Chavez assured me, empties into the larger Tinaco, which in turn flows into the Portuguesa, thus at high water offering another route to the Apure without the ride to San Rafael. Col. Duane, who passed through el Altar in 1823 on his trip from Caracas to Bogotá, makes the same claim, if I rightly recall the interesting and informing record he has left for those that enjoy tales of travel in out-of-the-way places. But I had no time for experimenting; moreover, the rivers were not full, as it was April and only the beginning of the rain, which proved most agreeable after the dust-laden, arid llanos to the west. When I had crossed the llanos in February, everything was parched, save the moriche palm. Now, with only a week or so of rain, already a notable change in the foliage could be seen, while the thermometer ranged from 88° to 92° in the day and from 60° to 65° at night. Indeed, in early weeks of the wet season is the best time to travel the llanos provided you are inured to tropical weather and have the temperament and the physical hardihood to withstand its miasmatic

Digitized by Google

influence. Yet, even in the dust, I always enjoyed those great, grass plains which extend from the Orinoco to the north coast range and west to the Cordilleras of the Andes. There's something appealing to me in the sweep of the land with its patches of woodland, its groves of moriche palm—the almost invariable pointer to water and the isolated hut of its native cowboy—the llanero.

Life is no sinecure for the llanero, a hard working chap who gives heavily for what he gets out of life. Usually in small companies, at the ratio of about one for every sixty head of cattle, he wanders hither and thither, content to home where he throws down his skins for the night or in the primitive palm rancho he builds when stationed. In view of his lonely life it is not surprising he is as superstitious and as fearful of spirits as the Indian of the mountain, or that he is ever apprehensive of the will-o'-the-wisp which dances over the llanos under certain atmospheric conditions. If within reach, he attends the fiesta and, no doubt, gets drunk with the rest of llanos mankind, for such is the popular form of celebration among the peasantry. Fiestas come, where the tonca bean grows, frequently in February and March, the time of plenty, but, in May, when the crops are over and the wet season sets in to last until July or August, sometimes even into September, life grows sombre indeed.

Not the least cause of his woes is the jaguar, who takes toll of the pigs and the dogs wherever a settlement of llaneros raise their ranchos for permanent abode near water enough to assure a crop of plantains, which, with coffee and "carne seca" (dried

Digitized by Google

meat), constitute the fundamentals of his daily menu. Fresh beef is a luxury. It's a day of rejoicing when the llanero has a sancocho, for cattle are not killed for the feeding of such as he; hence, the 'longshoreman fares better, for he makes sancocho of any kind of fish, including sharks, which he has always at hand.

From the time we came out of el Altar all the way to Gunare, we rode through the edge of the llanos, frequently crossing small streams with thickly wooded banks. Now and again we came to those canals or caños, and ponds typical of these llanos, which are quite shallow in the dry season, sometimes disappearing, but in the time of rains are full and even boisterous. As when crossing to Calabozo, I was surprised at the comparatively few cattle in sight because of the many being kept on the lower llanos south and east of the Apure River during the dry season. Yet is it a fact that there are fewer cattle on these plains than formerly, before Castro so sapped the industrial vitality of the people by his greedy and unscrupulous methods.

San Rafael is a tiny settlement mostly church, and accounted the port of the Portuguesa, but I decided to go on six miles to Gunare, where I thought the chances better for getting provisions and an outfit. 'Twas through here also the road ran which Professor Bingham and Dr. Hamilton Rice travelled to Bogotá, whence the latter made his important trip across country to the headwaters of the Uaupes. Churches, including some picturesque old ones, remain the chief impression of the several little villages along my fifty-mile ride down this trail from the Cojedes. Acarigua, a short distance below Cojedes, was

Digitized by Google

the only town looking prosperous; in fact (official reports to the contrary notwithstanding), it appeared to my eye more important and populous than Gunare, which was a sorry disappointment despite its two thousand people, and reputation of being " the " city of this corner of the llanos. With its careworn air and big church it did not look a promising outfitting point, as we rode in, but Chavez had said he knew here just the man for me, and so the town's hopeless appearance gave me no concern as we ambled through the adobes, for I had grown to depend on what Chavez said; indeed he impressed me so favourably I sought to induce him to go with me, for every other Venezuelan, unless born a llanero, is at home on the water; but he had no stomach for it.

On the day following our arrival he fetched me an unusually tall, slender, and very dark Indian who wore an enormous grass hat nearly covering his shoulders, and a pair of blue canvas trousers hoisted midway between bare ankles and knees. Named Ignacio, he belonged to that class of wanderers who, though willing and able to put in day after day at hard paddling, can rarely be induced for love or money to work on land. There are many such in Venezuela that travel the rivers catching fish and birds; or roam the land getting an odd job here or there, while the plantains, the bananas, the " pawpaw " (breadfruit), and the " palo de vaca " (cow tree) furnish food and milk for which they have but to reach forth a hand; yet, curiously enough, great numbers of them live wretchedly.

Chavez had the beans and carne seca and coffee delivered at the house of his friend where we slept,

Digitized by Google

and on the second day after arrival, we packed it all on one horse to Ignacio's falca, and within an hour thereafter had started on our way.

The Portuguesa is perhaps the largest of several tributaries of the Apure flowing southeasterly through these western llanos, and in its course, which we followed for ten days, receives several little rivers on its own account, mostly from the north on its upper reaches, but near its mouth others enter from the south bank. In truth, by the time you come finally to the Apure, it's hard to say whether you officially are on the Portuguesa or one of the contributors to its volume. If it fills its banks at high water it must be considerable of a river, and it was, in truth, already quite a stream as we neared San Fernando de Apure, though where we launched our canoe it had been wide and shallow. For the greater part of the western half it continued a single, somewhat narrow channel, which wound around sandbars, no doubt fully covered in high water, or spread out in shoal and sluggish stretches between low banks whose brush-covered tops scarce concealed the adjoining flat country. It would take a lively imagination, indeed, to describe the Portuguesa as a picturesque waterway; and the country through which it flows is no less monotonous. Towards the western end the banks are heavily wooded, but farther into the llanos, to the south and east, they thin out, and brush and canebrakes and jungle become the characteristic covering. Occasionally we met natives, sometimes Venezuelans, sometimes Indians, mostly rovers like Ignacio, I decided; and we could have lodged at a rancho for at least three of the nights on the river.

Digitized by Google

One rancho of a group where we stopped an hour or two in the day was scarcely more than a shed; four uprights with a covering of thatched palm. A loosely braided, straw curtain, shifted according to direction of wind and rain, offered only a little protection against either, while the moist spots in the earth floor proved the roof of slightly better construction. Most of these ranchos are suitable only for the hot, dry weather which prevails at intervals during about half the year. For the steady downpour and frequent driving storms of the rainy season they are as unfitted as well could be. It isn't difficult to believe in the Darwinian theory of evolution if you travel a little among wilderness people.

Ignacio had asserted very confidently that we should see jaguar, as did the natives along the river, but by now I was accustomed to this, the customary story of the land, and took no stock of it. Floating down-stream as we were, landing here and there the better to see some bird that may have attracted my attention, making short side excursions in quest of the wild life I sought to study—jaguar was but an incident in my trip, and as I have said, unless you can hunt systematically with dogs, getting one is chiefly a matter of luck. Yet luck was with me, as you shall see.

Late one afternoon, while we paddled slowly, cautiously, around a bend in the wake of what I thought to be a great, white jabiru stork which had flown from the river up a small currentless caño that twisted back into the llano, my eyes fell suddenly on jaguar, two jaguar, apparently at the very water's edge where a light covering bush only half

Digitized by Google

concealed them. With no commotion at all I instantly backed water, a signal Ignacio well understood, and in less time than it takes to write it we were under the protecting bank. Then to Ignacio's instant animation I whispered " tigre."

Standing in the bow, with ready rifle, and a leg on either side the cross seat to steady me, I bade him advance with utmost quiet, keeping close to the bank so as to round the point slowly. Approaching noiselessly we came just at the turn, where peering cautiously through the brush screen with breath all but suspended in my hushed eagerness, I saw in very life two jaguar, one for the entire length of its body, the other to just back of the shoulders. They appeared to be engaged in post-prandial ablutions, alternately tonguing their paws and washing their noses for all the world like the giant cats they really are. The animal in full view was the male and larger, and occasionally he would turn his head towards the female at his side as if caressing her shoulder or neck, though from my position I could only see his head moving in rhythmic motion—and my imagination supplied the reason. There was no play between them so far as I could see, but they were obviously on most friendly terms, surveying one another with the quiet-eyed content of intimate and agreeable relationship. They licked and stretched in peace and silence, a communion, as it were, of stomachs well filled but recently, very likely at no great distance from where they lay, for your true jaguar is a water lover and ranges near by a stream when he can. I was so interested watching them I quite forgot for the moment the business of trophy getting, and even recollecting

Digitized by Google

continued to feast upon the domestic scene so rare a sight in a hunter's lifetime. I cannot say how many minutes I had stood gazing at them—when the female quietly and for no reason I could discover withdrew into the enveloping jungle, while the male showed signs of following. But on that instant I ceased to be the fascinated student and became instead the zealous hunter of wild life.

Holding as steady as I could on a platform not entirely at rest, I fired into the chest of the male just as he was rising. A sullen growl, a crash of brush, and silence and emptiness where a second before had been jaguar, was the result of my shot. Paddling quickly round the bend I was prepared to find blood in plenty to witness my score, for the distance was little over seventy-five feet, and picking up the spoor easily I followed at good pace though with utmost caution, for the brush was thickish and well calculated to conceal an awaiting and maddened beast. For half a mile I stalked warily through the jungle before emerging upon the llanos edge, along which ran the trail of blood. It seemed remarkable the beast could lose so much and keep travelling, and I was expecting to come upon his dead body at any moment, when directly from my left front came the crooning, snarling you may have heard the house cat make on a much smaller scale when the dog has come near her as she chewed on a mouthful of mouse.

Swinging sharply, with gun at shoulder, I discovered the male crouched not over thirty feet away, grimacing at me hideously and growling ominously, the female, a bit back on the near side, also crouched and making faces, though I do not recall hearing her

Digitized by Google

voice. She seemed indeed to be taking the situation so easily I was encouraged to attempt a little manœuvring in order to get a clearer shot at her mate, but on my sidling to the right, he sprang at me, landing short, and before he could gather himself for another attempt, I put a ball in his head. With the fall of her companion, the female recoiled to one side, and was making off when I stopped her with a raking shot through the hindquarters which brought her down tearing and raging. Dragging her hind legs and snarling furiously, she continued coming until I closed her struggle with a second bullet. The male was of good size, with pelt in excellent condition, measuring about seven feet from the tip of its nose to the end of its tail; the female was a foot and a half smaller.

If Ignacio had principles against working on land, he certainly set them aside while in my employ, for a more willing or helpful man Friday I never had. He had followed me ashore, which I considered plucky of him, as he had no weapon but his machete, and now indulged in fervid admiration of the rapid work of the rifle. Having removed the pelts and instructed him to return to the canoe with them and await me, I went on a bit to see if perchance the great, white stork had outlasted the bombardment. But though I found a small lagoon and other likely territory, no sight of the jabiru rewarded me, though there were many of the birds now become familiar figures as we approached the Apure—spoonbills, ibis, small herons, egrets.

Drawing close to the canoe I explored the caño in

Digitized by Google

a last vain hope that perhaps on the other clearer side the jabiru might be found in its peaceful pose. But no more uncommon sight repaid my toilsome threading of the jungle along the water's edge than an iguana, the big tropical lizard whose tail is a native relish in South America, Siam, Malaya. The biggest I ever saw was in South America on one of the Apure tributaries. It had jumped to the ground from the low limb of a tree which my men had surrounded, and thence into the water, leaving a two-foot tail behind —a yarn you will probably consider as entitling me to membership in the nature faking class, but which only gives what actually happened, none the less, before my eyes, precisely as I recount it. It is an unlovely looking creature with a head similar in outline to that of the horned toad common in southwest United States, and a spinal column which rears on high in the middle where the dorsal vertebræ appear to have broken forth in an abnormal, not to say riotous growth. On a small scale it resembles the extinct Stegosaurus, so if you wish a vague idea of what the iguana looks like, visit the Museum of Natural History in New York and view the reproduction of its prehistoric prototype.

Reaching the canoe, I found Ignacio had been doing some successful hunting on his own account. He had cut down with his machete a brownish snake about five feet long, which he said was the "macaurel" or "macaure" that lives in trees and is "malo" (bad). It had the poisonous type head, and most likely was one of the deadly lance-heads; but I saw no other. Indeed, snakes were the wild life of which

Digitized by Google

I saw the least, though they fairly squirm on every page of most accounts of South American travel. Not that snakes are lacking, but they get out of your way; you may hear them often, particularly in the dry season, but to see one is unusual—at least, such was the experience of my five trips into the wilderness of the great continent which we know so slightly and continue to overlook so persistently.

As if to amend her previous disregard of my importunities, the elusive Dame who rules our destinies, whether we be in town or jungle, now proceeded to embarrass me with gifts. The very next day we arrived at a rancho a short distance back from the river where the family loudly bemoaned the loss of a favourite dog carried off by the jaguar, so they said, and, told by Ignacio of our exploit of the previous day, besought me to find and shoot the thief. I was not averse, of course, to comply, but as it was now mid-afternoon, and the dog had been seized before daylight, I thought the chance slim of catching up with the jaguar, which would probably make a single meal of so small a quarry and therefore not return for further feasting thus to provide us with opportunity for seeing, if not killing. However, I signified my willingness to make the try.

Followed by Ignacio, and each of them carrying a spear, the man of the rancho led the way inland across the open llanos to a grove whence he claimed to have heard the yelps of his dog, and we had not searched over half an hour before we found its mutilated remains. I was now convinced that the marauder was a smaller beast than jaguar, and would return to finish

Digitized by Google

its repast as night drew on; so at my suggestion we each went up a tree overlooking the kill. No birds came here at sundown as at the water-holes over Maracaibo way, but of furtive, small animal life there was much and varied; the jungle seeming to be literally alive with small rodents. How one can walk amid these hordes without seeing a head! It is to marvel! A nearby howling monkey disturbed the peace, subsiding in a long, dismal wail as the dusk thickened. Suddenly, as if out of the earth, appeared a large cat. After a quick survey, it fell upon the carcass, and at once I shot, tumbling the creature over with the first cartridge. Scrambling out of the trees we found what Ignacio called a "tegrillo" (little tigre), though it had none of the jaguar markings. On the contrary, it was grayish with black markings, about the size of a big lynx; in fact, except for its long tail, it might have been a monster bob-cat.

There was rejoicing at the rancho when we returned, and a sancocho prepared to celebrate the death of the robber and do honour to the guest, as they insisted on making me. The poverty of the household, with father, mother, four children and the wife's sister in the one room with shed annex, was unmistakable, but it seemed to have no dampening influence upon the spirits or the bounty of the family; the children raced and tumbled while the elders ate and talked and laughed with never a sigh or a sign of care. There was no hard-luck story in that house. Yet the roof leaked, a raw, chill wind sifted through the flimsy, palm-leaf sides, and so far as I could see, except for coffee and a large thin slab of carne seca,

Digitized by Google

Photo. by G. L. M. Brown

SAN FERNANDO DE APURE IN THE RAINY SEASON

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

our sancocho emptied the larder. Truly, happiness is comparative!

The father, in the summer season, was a plume hunter, he told me, devoting his efforts almost entirely to the egrets, whose feathers he took to San Fernando de Apure to a milliner's agent, who assorted and forwarded them to New York. The last year had been a poor one for him; indeed, for several seasons the general annual plume harvest had fallen far below the standard, because of the great and repeated yearly slaughter. He referred enthusiastically to the profits of the business, declaring he had in a few weeks' hunting made enough to keep him a year, and one hundred birds in a single visit to a colony rookery not unusual.

Killing an egret is as easy as killing chickens in the yard, he explained, because the birds return year after year to the same places to make their rookeries, which are closely occupied in great numbers, and because they are easy of approach during their breeding period—the only time they wear the white nuptial plume (worn by both sexes between the shoulders), known to the millinery world as aigrette. Formerly, when the birds were so plentiful as to yield a quick and bountiful harvest, only the nuptial plume was carried away, but now some of the finer of the egret's other feathers are taken in small quantities. In reply to my particular query if moulted feathers are gathered, he answered that some such are used by the Indians for decorative purposes, but none of commercial value are ever found on the ground, the season of slaughter being while the birds are nesting, when the plumes are in full lustre and life. With the

Digitized by Google

decrease of the egret,* or little white heron, native gunners from San Fernando and Bolívar in the employ of the millinery interests are beginning to kill other birds of attractive plumage, which previously have been unmolested—several of the larger herons, the cranes, spoonbills, ibises, being thus preyed upon. In short, he added that the entire bird colony is becoming perceptibly reduced in numbers.

All kinds of bird and reptile life increased as we reached the Apure River, and by the time we had arrived at San Fernando, every lagoon we saw swarmed with the heron-crane-ibis-wader type, and every waterway with crocodiles.

As the back door, so to say, of Venezuela, and a town doing considerable business, I had pictured San Fernando as something better than nondescript. Centred about the port are buildings somewhat in accord with its commercial importance, but back of these it becomes for the greater part a straggling, uncared-for adobe village. Maybe the fickleness of the river is a contributing cause to the town's unimposing appearance. By turns it is left high and dry beyond the reach of its regular steamers, or so inundated the flooded streets are navigated only by means of boats. In midsummer I have seen the river but a shrunken image of the one thousand foot tide I found the last of April, with heavy rains to come.

---

* There are two, both pure white—the smaller and more exquisitely plumed snowy or little heron (*Egretta candidissima*) and the twice as large American or white egret (*Herodias egretta*), whose plumes are straight and not recurved at tip as on the little heron.

Digitized by Google

Having replenished the supplies exhausted by our loitering along the Portuguesa, and exchanged our low dugout for a higher-sided canoe more suited to the rougher water we should soon meet, we took up our way again through a veritable fairyland of bird life. Shortly, the Apure divides itself into two main streams, and in high water offers a maze of channels and caños to the bewilderment of the traveller. All that country to the west, lying between the Apure and the Arauca rivers, is floodland. Indeed, the lower section might, with good reason, be called the Apure delta, for here the two rivers join by a branch which the Apure sends south, thus making an island of a part of the west Orinoco bank. From the Arauca south to the Meta is about a seven or eight-day ride across savannahs or llanos which are passable most of the year, though it is not until beyond the Meta that the country really rises above floodland. Riding in the Apure-Arauca delta, if I may so call it, is out of the question, except by boat during the wet season. Here and along the southern reaches of the Apure itself are the egret shambles.

Although this section is monotonous and uninteresting as to scenery, it offers a fascinating journey in the early wet season to one sufficiently devoted to the study of wild life to be above the torture of insects and the discomfort of constant rain. At least, so I found it, extending my ten days from San Fernando into another nine while we explored the Apure mouth and the streams coming into it. Here I made acquaintance with that fish terror which is common to the lower waters of the Apure, especially in the Orinoco at the big bend, and called " el caribe "

Digitized by Google

by the natives and *Serrasalmo humeralis* by the scientists. It is more dreaded than the crocodile; although less than a foot in length, man and beast alike shun whatever water it frequents, for it travels in schools and attacks with such ferocity that both have died from being bitten. It has a grayish back, an orange belly, a mouth full of canine teeth and if its upper jaws were a little longer, its profile would quite resemble that of a small pike. Blood, not flesh, is what the fish craves, and you have only to squeeze blood upon the surface of the water to see it rise snapping, a method by which it may be caught, for the caribe is excellent eating, as I can attest.

Both heat and rain increased as we pursued our river journey; the mercury going up from an average of 90° to 93°–94°, while at night it clung to 80°. One day, a terrific thunder and lightning storm caused Ignacio to grovel terror-stricken at the bottom of the canoe, to my amazement, for although I found that everywhere in wilderness South America my Indians feared thunder and lightning as manifestations of the dreaded evil spirits, yet none had been so affected as this fellow. One would think these people accustomed to the tropical storms which rage with such violence.

In these last days of paddling over the lower Apure country I had a good view of many kinds of birds, but never succeeded in getting close to the jabiru stork,* which I craved more than a jaguar, and

* Professor Bingham got one on his trip to Bogota having a wing spread of 7 feet 10 inches and a beak one foot long.

Digitized by Google

for which I had extended my wanderings over this lower Apure country to the very limit of my time. It is not always possible, however, to secure the trophy you want even in South America, and I was forced to leave with this desire unrealized. More fortunate was Ignacio, who appeared to have no ambition unfilled, when, before boarding the little Apure steamer for Ciudad Bolívar, I left with him my canoe and presents in both hands.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XVIII

TRAILING AFTER JAGUAR

Chancing upon Pedro for my first jaguar hunt in South America is the story of how an indulgent Providence came to the rescue of a wandering hunter who had little time and less money.

Unable to secure any dependable information of the game even at Sante Fe near the mouth of the Rio Salado, I went up the Parana River prospecting for a district and a guide likely to give most results in the time at my disposal. The territory of Corrientes was my objective, particularly that western part which borders the vast pampas and forest wilderness of the Gran Chaco across the river.

Just above the capital town, the Parana bends abruptly to the east and then north, making the southerly and westerly boundaries of Paraguay, before extending far into southwestern Brazil to thus form the great southern division of the Flowing Road and run a course second only to that of the Amazon. South of the east-flowing Parana a notorious lagoon is reported to be the resort of beasts and many kinds of crawling things, and almost every day as I ascended the river its reptilian and fever horrors were recounted for my benefit. If you turn to your map of the Argentine Republic, you will get a clearer idea of the locality of this ill-famed haunt. I will here, however, anticipate my story and so dismiss the subject, by saying that I was never able to induce a native for love or money to undertake to pilot me

Digitized by Google

thither, though I located and one day intend to penetrate its mysteries; for here and in the little known Gran Chaco run many trails of the jaguar.

So with no definite disembarking port in mind, I sailed up river, getting all the data I could and trusting entirely to my wilderness traveller faculty of making the most of whatever finally offered.

It is a prolific waterway, this mud-colored Parana, with broad, changeful body, dividing over and over into parallel rivers sometimes as much as a mile in width, anon to gather again to the one common mother stream. Where the Paraguay coming from many miles north in Brazil joins the Parana near Corrientes the banks for a space are two and three miles apart, and when the Uruguay adds also its volume the three become the Rio de la Plata, a veritable inland sea with shores so widely separated you can not see either from midstream.

Always one is coming upon islands, sometimes submerged almost to the top of their small tree growth, again showing high against the lower bank of one side—for one bank of the river is invariably low; and most of the time it is the west one. A monotonous panorama indeed. Boundless pampas stretch away on the west to the foot of the Andes with here and there a group of trees to show where some ranchman has his house. Now and then a pole replaces the trees, floating a small white flag from its top as a sign of "almacen" (store); but with the Gran Chaco begins tropical forest.

A rough-travelling, fickle river it is and a pilot must know his business to pass safely through its shifting shoals; ever altering the boat's direction

Digitized by Google

to conform to the tortuous channel, steaming ahead by day and night, stopped only by fog, which is often heavy. Few pilots have I ever encountered, indeed, that know their business better than these on the Parana, always on watch, as they need be, and depending upon keenness of vision to read aright the signs of the courses which vary so constantly.

It was with a pilot of this class that I made friends. Standing on the top deck photographing a passing craft, the strong wind had snatched me bareheaded in the noon-day sun, sweeping my hat down the deck and over the stern rail into the water; and, by way of illustrating native apathy, no one of all the other many passengers on deck made an effort to stay the runaway headgear. My own indifference to the loss seemed to arouse interest in Lucas—for as I turned from taking the snapshot and wound in another film, I caught his black eyes eloquent with speech, though the tongue uttered only "se va" —it has gone. The humour of the situation appealed to both of us and we were at once on easy terms.

He was a pilot, he told me, on the steamers which run from Buenos Aires, in Argentine, to Asuncion, in Paraguay, but had been laid off a week or so by the "chuchu" (fever), and was now going over to Parana to rejoin his boat. He was about thirty, with hair hanging below his ears, a small black mustache, and a large, square-crowned, black sombrero, securely fastened to his head by a string under the chin that tied in a bow-knot below his left ear. His trousers, though not so full in the leg, were fastened at the ankles Zouave fashion. He wore an ordinary European sack coat, a waist sash of the worsted fre-

Digitized by Google

quently seen on up-country natives, a collarless shirt, and a very much soiled white handkerchief around his neck. On his feet were a kind of heel-less leather slippers, unadorned. His father was Italian and his mother a native, he said; a parentage quite usual to not only a majority of pilots, but also to great numbers of Argentine's 'longshoremen. Truth to tell, the Italian is becoming to South America, and particularly to Argentine, what the Chinaman is to Malaya and Siam, viz., the industrial backbone; for the native here as in parts of the Far East is not a dependable labourer.

There is not much colour in the costume of the native Argentine, but Lucas made the most of it, though in all his regalia he showed not nearly the picturesqueness of the rivermen of Eastern Canada or of our own extreme northwest. Absence of colour, both in costume and habitation, indeed, is the chief disillusionment of the traveller in South America; and not the least factor in shattering the spell is the "gaucho," as the Argentine cattle tender is called. According to the tourist trumpeter, the gaucho is a picturesquely clad cowboy of transcendent horsemanship. Actually, he is rather commonplace in appearance and not in the same riding class with the keen-eyed type of our Western cowboy. In the "gato," a kind of walk-round dance to guitar accompaniment, with "facon" (knife) stuck in his wide belt, the gaucho may swagger to the deception of tenderfeet, but afield, in the saddle, he is, to trained eyes, the most overdrawn character in South America—and dirty.

Alongside of the American red man, or the native of the mysterious Far East, but little of human

Digitized by Google

interest worth noting may be found among the dwellers in South America outside of interior Brazil. In fact, Paris excepted, the cities of Italy or Spain or France show more colour than the towns of South America; while of home manufactured articles there are practically none, except the "poncho" (a blanket with a head hole, worn over the shoulders), a few crude household utensils, wool rugs, and the "Panama" and other palm straw hats.

If it lacked "colour," at least the human freight of the river boat was varied. The first-class filled the cabins amid a jumble of tin trunks, bundles and bird cages—half of them it seemed carried a bird cage—while the third-class shared the stern deck with great piles of fruit and vegetables, and the chickens, ducks and sheep. Like all Latin-Americans, though abashed before strangers, they were instinct with life and gaiety among themselves, the solemn little children with their splendid, wondering eyes becoming radiant imps under the influence of parental romping. Unvarying politeness and universal love for children are the traits which warm my heart to these people. I never tire watching a native woman at play with her babe; such a flow of tender diminutives and rapturous vivacity! there is no sight more pleasing in all of South America.

When the boat stopped to discharge passengers the men sauntered forward, with poncho thrown bullfighter fashion over one shoulder, leading the elder children. The women carried a majority of the bundles and showed a tendency to violent dress effects—a yellow waist being as likely worn with a purple as with a black or brown skirt. Harmony is not a

Digitized by Google

preëminent feature of the modernized costume of the South American woman of the people; but its most discordant note is the hat. It is remarkable what a transformation ensues when the average Spanish-American woman replaces her mantua with a European hat. It is like putting a bonnet on Aphrodite; not that these women of the South are so perfect—but the hat appears to destroy the grace and dignity of a naturally graceful and attractive figure. It is nearly as dreadful a presentment as the Japanese woman in European clothes. From Brazil down the coast and across the Andes, through Chile and into Peru, the better class of women have discarded the mantua, although, in Peru, they wear the mantilla, while the lower class retain the mantua for church attendance.*

Frankly, I preferred the deck passengers to those occupying cabins, for whereas the one fitted to their environment, the other lacked the behaviour and habits which belong to purchasers of first-class quarters. And that leads to another of the impressions made upon the traveller into South America, particularly into Brazil. There is wide pretence to culture, but outside a select and delightful few, in truth very slight familiarity with the canons of refined people. It is as though a simple-minded, simple-living pastoral people had recently attained to wealth and set up town houses. But the European stock, originally

* A solid-colour shawl, almost invariably black, sometimes blue for gala occasions, which is worn over the head and shoulders. The mantilla is of lace, and covers only the head and the neck; for church and street wear it is black; as an evening wrap it is white.

Digitized by Google

low, for the most part, is gradually clarifying, especially in the Argentine, and strengthening in the developing country of its adoption. Meanwhile, there is not the vulgar display or the boorish manners or blatant voice of the corresponding class which predominates in the high-price New York restaurant.

Lucas was very eager to learn something of me, whence I came, and what had brought me into his country; and when I told him I wanted to make my way north into Corrientes to a famous lagoon where were jaguar, he grew much concerned. He had heard of the lagoon, and held it in horror; but he said he had a riverman friend living not many miles above Parana who had not only seen the lagoon, but had killed tigre in the Gran Chaco.

Here at last was the very man I sought. Did Lucas think his friend Pedro could be persuaded to go with me? "Oh, si, si" (yes, yes); Lucas was sure of it, and promised to bring Pedro to me at once on our landing.

It must not be supposed all this information came to me so easily or so quickly as I am here writing it. My Spanish was none too fluent and the three hours from Santa Fe to Parana none too long for the task. But even had it been unnecessary to laboriously repeat each simple sentence, I should in some way have prolonged the confab with Lucas, for his happy laugh and child-like interest in my plans were very agreeable. To arouse in another such unselfish interest in one's own schemes is a novel experience to the New Yorker. Had Lucas not been obliged to join his boat, he would have gone with me himself: he said so—and I believe he meant it.

Digitized by Google

THE GAUCHO IN THE FIELD, ALSO SHOWING THE WOODLAND OCCASIONALLY SEEN ON THE PAMPAS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

I was elated with the thought of securing a guide who had been into the Gran Chaco, for this great wilderness is known to but few men and has few roads save the waterways which cut it through from northwest to southeast. Although of the Argentine Republic, it is occupied almost solely by Indians of a common source but maintaining several tribal distinctions and dialects. Of smallish stature they are also of rather a low intellectual order; those I saw of the Mocovito tribe, that find their homes along the jungles on the Rio Salado, resembled the nomads who trail over northwestern Mexico, particularly where it touches the California Gulf. The Gran Chaco people are neither imaginative nor creative. They have no arts other than the manufacture of crude earthen pots, and of bows, arrows and lances, which they make of hard wood; their arrows, I must add, are very skilfully turned, and fitted with a shaft of willow, a head of hard wood and sometimes of notched bone.

Their house or "toldo" is roundish and squat, varying in size according to the extent of the family, though in general having a diameter of six to seven feet. It is built of willows stuck in the ground, drawn together at the top and covered with straw or vine or leaves to such a depth that the roof is made waterproof, as it must needs be in their rainy country. They are not unlike a type of summer-house made by the American Apache.

As is customary with wilderness people, all the work is done by the women, from the making of the earthen cooking utensils, the gathering of the wood and the building of the toldos, to the gathering of

Digitized by Google

roots which they boil and eat. Of ornaments they have few, sometimes skins and sometimes birds' feathers, but, by preference, when they can get them by trading, the plumes of the rhea, commonly called "ostrich," which are worn on the forehead, at the waist, ankles and wrist. Slight attention is given to clothes; once they made a kind of loin covering from cocoanut and other plant fibre, now they adopt such rag-tag and bob-tail garments as come their way, and are especially fond of anything red.

There are places in the Chaco where these aborigines resent the intrusion of the white man; have even opposed exploration and killed the adventurers, but as a people they are a poor lot, cowardly and scattering. Yet, it is well to be armed and to keep your eyes open, if you journey into their country, for their habit is to ambush the march or sneak up when you are sleeping. Several explorers have lost their lives in the Gran Chaco, but from all I could discover, bad management was quite as responsible as Indian truculence. The Argentine government maintains a post at the frontier and the condition seems to be one of ever-recurring reprisal on the part of both soldiers and Indians. The Indian policy is a mighty poor one—too closely patterned after that Spain pursued in the Philippines.

Pedro was not on the dock when we arrived at Parana, and Lucas, even more concerned than I, sought to comfort me by the assurance that he would certainly find him; so as Lucas set forth to explore the river front, I went up to the little hotel in the town atop the high bank. Although not interesting, as indeed few towns are in the Argentine, yet Parana

Digitized by Google

is one of the most pleasingly situated in the Republic. It is on the east bank of the Parana River, one hundred and twenty feet above the water, about two miles back from the landing, and with its twenty-five thousand inhabitants is the chief centre of a very rich surrounding country. It has the cobblestone streets so common to South American cities, which loosen the teeth of the unwary stranger on his first drive. The streets must be paved, otherwise cart wheels would disappear from view and usefulness, but why they are so partial to such an aggressive pinnacle of stone no one could say. To me Parana is a confused recollection of imposing cathedral, ever-clanging bells, and jarring streets.

It was not quite daylight next morning when, with his friend in tow, Lucas joined me. Pedro was absolutely the opposite type of Lucas. He was a small, dried-up Spaniard, simple and conventional in dress. He wore conventional trousers, a felt hat, a pair of canvas shoes, and a worn skimp white canvas coat, buttoned up the front. More truthfully, the coat had been white at one period in its existence; a period that had passed long before my introduction to him. Nevertheless, I could see he took great pride in this garment and kept it always closed to its limit of button. It looked as though it had been a soldier's jacket, and Pedro furthered the suggestion by strips of the same material sewn across the shoulder like the straps of a commissioned officer. However unprepossessing his dress, Pedro's face was attractive. It was a wrinkled, sallow old face, but the wrinkles around the eyes told of good nature, and the look in the eye

Digitized by Google

itself, though not brilliant, was steady and inviting.

While we had the invariable coffee and cigarettes, Lucas held forth long and earnestly with Pedro, and though he talked so rapidly I could not follow, yet a word here and there told me he was impressing Pedro with the need of doing his best for me, laying special emphasis on the fact that I was making a journey of "ten thousand miles" to see this little bit of country. To all of which Pedro nodded, raising his hands in acquiescence and interjecting "como no" (why not; surely), so frequently as to appear to bear the full burden of his share in the conversation. Then we all got into a three-horse cart and drove bumpingly down to the river, where, to my genuine regret, Lucas bade me good-bye.

From no one in South America did I take leave more reluctantly than from this same pilot who, out of pure, genuine desire to help a stranger, had put me on my way and revealed the heart of a gentleman. I lost his address in subsequent rains and swamps. Should this ever fall under his eye I hope he will make his whereabouts known to me.

Pedro was not very talkative, and when he did interrupt his habitual silence I could not understand him so readily as I had Lucas, for half the blood in Pedro's veins came from a Chaco mother, and their trick of talking in their throats adds to the difficulties of a foreigner's Spanish. Therefore, our attempts at conversation were few and widely separated. Not that he was at all surly; on the contrary, he was very good-natured and willing, and, as I found before I got through the trip, considerable of a philosopher; a quality I strove to emulate, for

Digitized by Google

there was need of it in the almost constant downpour of rain we encountered day by day on our little journey after jaguar.

In a dug-out of rather well-turned bow and stern, we set forth on our way up the Parana. The river was stirring with the beginning of a wind storm, known locally as a pampero, and what with the waves and the strong current to buck against, we had our work cut out to make fair headway, hugging the east bank. Often we eased our work by the slower poling. I had no clear idea of precisely where we were going. Lucas had given me some vague information, probably all he had, and in a general way I understood Pedro's house, quite a little distance up the river, to be the rendezvous from which we were to make up the Feliciano River toward a section Pedro " knew " offered a fair prospect of jaguar. The need of continuously hard blade work gave little opportunity to observe the scenery as we went along; and in truth there was not much to look at, nor could we have seen it very clearly even had there been, for the wind-blown spray from the tops of the choppy waves, and the rain driving all around the compass, left our eyes swimming. From my post in the bow with head bent to the storm I saw nothing beyond the reach of my paddle. And whether we were on the main stream or a branch of it I cannot say, for none but a pilot knows just where he is on this much divided river.

We, of course, clung almost within touching distance of the bank, to ease our work as much as possible, and twice we narrowly escaped collision with other canoes running down stream at a lively pace.

Digitized by Google

Three times we stopped at the thatched-roofed house of Pedro's always polite and hospitable friends, to wipe our eyes and drink the Paraguayan tea which to the native is consolation and chief liquid nourishment, and withal a refreshing beverage for anybody. This tea is made from an indigenous holly-like (ilex) plant and prepared by putting its powdered leaves in a small gourd and pouring in boiling water. A few moments' steeping makes it ready to be sucked out of the gourd receptacle through a tube which has a perforated expansion at one end, and is called "bombilla" (little pump). This tea is called "yerbà matè," or more commonly "matê"—not a very definite name surely, for yerbà means simply herb, and matê is the dried and hollowed gourd. But, however casually named, its popularity is wide, and so great that cultivation is now supplementing the supply which comes from the great forests of Brazil, Paraguay and northern Argentine. Some day I expect the drink to spread beyond South America.

Toward the close of day, we drew up to a settlement of half a dozen houses set snug against the river bank, and here, Pedro announced, was his "casa" (house). A quaint two-room adobe it was, stuck against the bank so close as to suggest its being a vestibule to caverns and underground passages beyond; a fancy rather helped by an unroofed shed which joined one side. But the house really trespassed on the bank no farther than to permit of a very small and dark coop to accommodate the three family chickens. If, however, Pedro was short on chickens, he was long on dogs, having five of various mongrel degrees and size, all of which lived indoors,

Digitized by Google

together with his wife and four children. In repose his wife looked as if the ménage got on her nerves, but in conversation she far outshone Pedro. The difference in the faces of these Spanish-Americans in repose and in animation is the difference between darkness and sunlight.

Outside and just at the entrance of the house was an open portico composed of a framework of poles and a covering of rushes and small brush, where the family received its guests, and the charcoal burning stove kept the kettle going. Here, on the night of our arrival, Pedro's friends gathered to drink matè, no doubt also to satisfy their curiosity concerning the stranger; and there was no more colour among them, or among those of other settlements subsequently visited, than among the passengers on the steamer. In fact, outside of the Chaco, Argentines are of the one type everywhere, perhaps here and there an individual bit of colour, but, as a rule, all cut off the same piece and unpicturesqueness as—Anglo-Saxons.

The matè cup is to the Spanish-American what the peace-pipe is to our American Indian. The cup itself may range from plain gourd to elaborately engraved metal, and the bombilla may be a silver tube or a reed, or even a curassow leg bone, but, like the betel-nut knife of the Far East, its significance is unvarying. It makes for amiability and gossip and story telling. There is often the little preliminary ceremony of starting the host's matè at one side of the gathering and passing it around like a loving cup, each guest taking his turn at the unwiped bombilla. Not fewer than a dozen could have been

Digitized by Google

seated under and around the little portico on this night when Pedro started the matè brew, and I happened to be on the extreme opposite end from that whence the gourd set forth on its convivial cruise. To have deliberately wiped the bombilla when it came to me would have been to insult my host, so I clumsily dropped it on the ground to give me the needed excuse.

Jaguar and jaguar hunting formed the main theme of the stories told that night, and disclosed the very wholesome fear these natives have of the beast, though they do not hold it in such superstitious dread, or envelop it with mystery or supernatural power, as the Far Eastern natives do that other greater cat, the real tiger. Yet the voice was always lowered that night in Pedro's house while reciting a thrilling tale of jaguar ferocity, and when Pedro himself told of having seen a tigre, not twenty miles from where he sat, spring upon a female tapir, crushing her neck in one bite of its powerful jaws, the silence which followed was eloquent. No one present save Pedro had ever hunted tigre, much less seen a live one, so my guide, warmed by the buzz of admiration which greeted and the hush which succeeded his stories, told harrowing yarns of men walking and mounted who had been overcome by jaguars springing upon them from overhanging tree limbs. Now the truth of the matter is, as I took pains to learn, that while these native stories are exaggerated, as native stories always are, the jaguar is formidable quarry. There are well authenticated reports in the Argentine of his pouncing upon the solitary traveller, and of his killing one or more of a native hunting

Digitized by Google

PEDRO BRINGS IN HIS DUG-OUT

ON THE SALADO RIVER

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

party that had wounded and cornered him. He is not nearly so numerous as he was, or rather is seen less frequently than formerly—not that he has been killed off, but the river traffic has driven him back from the waterways into the jungles and into the swamps and smaller river courses where few men venture.

The trails of the jaguar are many, but they nearly all lead to a river, for water appears to be more needful to the tigre than to any other of the cat family. And this is not that he actually drinks more, so far as I can learn, but rather because along the waterways he finds easy and abundant food supply in a river hog, in the small deer, and in the fish that swim plentifully in all these streams. In the Rio de la Plata, just off Buenos Aires, is an island where at one time several jaguar lived and thrived practically off the fish they caught. There was no other life on the island and never any evidence of the beasts visiting the mainland, which, so far as distance is concerned, was entirely possible, because the tigre is a strong, bold swimmer, and minds no river of South America, not the widest, if he wishes to reach the opposite bank. He is a patient, unerring fisherman, watching for long periods from some vantage point, which may be either a fallen tree trunk extending into the stream, or at the bank's edge, until a victim draws within reach, when with a lightning blow he hurls the fish out onto the bank. While the swampy jungle and the water courses are his habitat, yet the jaguar will make incursions upon dry ground if cattle, or horses, or dogs, or poultry offer, and river food happens to be scarce, or for the time being more

Digitized by Google

difficult to secure. I heard several trustworthy accounts of cattle and colts killed by the jaguar.

Pedro quoted a gray-haired herder, who had witnessed the performance, as authority for asserting that the jaguar's method of killing animals of this size is to literally stalk them up-wind to within the distance of a few bounds and then to rush upon them, springing on their back and fastening teeth and claws in their neck. In attacking smaller animals the jaguar springs at once for the neck, and appears to prefer the hindquarters to the stomach, which is left for the vultures that are omnipresent in the open country. Tigre is a much noisier animal than any other of the feline family, particularly at night, and roams the jungle disdainful of lesser beasts in his manifest superiority. Without doubt, he is absolute king of the South American forest; there is literally none to dispute his domain, none even worthy to do him homage; for the puma, which is the darker coated southern brother to our cougar, has as little the courage of its convictions in South as in North America.

From Venezuela to Patagonia the jaguar is commonly said to attack man unprovoked, but, as I have already said, such occasions are rare; all the same, it's well to keep your eyes open when entering his domain. The puma, cougar, panther, mountain lion (as variously called), tackles deer, sheep, goats, dogs, colts—I have heard of its springing upon horses—but except when painfully wounded and cornered, this cat will not molest man, though I did hear of its falling upon a sleeping native in the Argentine.

In the interior of Brazil, where not many people have ventured, the jaguar is reported to most fre-

Digitized by Google

quently lurk in the low, overhanging branches of trees, near the rivers, and from these to pounce upon its prey. In the Argentine Chaco, where tigre is said to have more than once taken toll, the Indians are deathly afraid of him, for their arrows and spears are not very suitable weapons with which to meet an enemy at once so swift and so powerful. Along the western edges of the Chaco certain of the "estancias" (large ranches) keep dogs and hunt jaguar with some success; under such conditions tigre takes to a tree like the cougar. Quite unlike, however, the latter pusillanimous creature, which, having crawled to a perch, suffers all manner of indignity without response, the jaguar may not be trifled with. No native climbs within arm's reach to poke him with a pole from the limb; in fact, he is quite likely to spring from the tree upon his tormentors.

Up the Parana beyond a small chain of hills called Cuchilla Montiel, that run northeast and southwest across northern Entre Rios into Corrientes, we turned into the Rio Feliciano, which, rising in Corrientes, flows parallel with the Cuchilla and is fed en route by several other streams having their source in the hills. Feliciano has the characteristics of all South American rivers of the tributary class, which are smaller editions of the larger ones, except that often the water is clearer and the better defined inland banks sometimes freer of the dense tropical growth. We paddled through a rather open, flat country supporting scattered trees, rank grass shoulder high, willows, and abounding bird life. One brown bird about robin size, with a long tail and a white streak on its breast, had a song somewhat like

Digitized by Google

the meadow lark, and in the early morning hours, before other life was astir, its liquid notes made pleasing music. Another, smaller, of dark body and yellow wings, uttered no note, but zigzagged constantly across our horizon; and I saw several varieties of blackbird, two cardinals, some flamingoes, and occasional members of the crane family. Mostly the smaller birds were songsters and quite friendly.

But one bird, always in evidence, which Pedro called the "teru-tero," was not such acceptable company. It is a noisy, perky imp, about the size of a pigeon, and so long as we were in the comparative open, it followed, scolding us in untuneful, harsh voice, as though resenting our intrusion. It was tame to the point of audacity; one stood on the bank within half a dozen feet as we glided past, and again as we rested for a meal, another perched on the canoe stern and slanged us with uninterrupted vehemence. When we reached the jungle edge we escaped the teru-tero, but suffered martyrdom at the throat of another smaller bird termagant, which, in rasping tones, shrieked at us unabatingly. If these birds are in league with tigre, as is said, he could not have two scouts more alert and distracting.

Except for this pair of brawlers, the bird life was most inviting; indeed, the Argentine birds as a class, while less brilliant as to plumage than Brazil, for instance, have more agreeable voices. Within the jungle occasionally I saw the toucan, with its ridiculously large orange-coloured beak, twice the size of its bluish-black, pigeon-shaped and white-breasted body. It is an awkward, comical looking bird, that lives solitary and shuns observation. In

Digitized by Google

this particular section where all plant life appeared to be horned either at leaf-point or at its junction with the stalk, I noted with speculative interest the many birds that are hooded or tufted.

In the night, along the river, great fire-flies such as I had never seen, even in Siam—land of insect plenty—hovered over us, bearing lights that appeared to be constant, and in some individual cases to be double. No doubt it is these more brilliant night lamps which the women of northern Argentine and Paraguay wear in their hair on festal occasions.

Two or three times Pedro tried, though unsuccessfully, to kill a crocodile with a long, iron-pointed spear he carried, and once his attempt nearly resulted in upsetting the canoe. Again he secured a hideous looking lizard creature for which he gave an unfamiliar name, but which to me looked to be of the iguana family. It had a red and green speckled skin and was about two and one-half feet long, with a short, thick tail, which Pedro proceeded to cut off, subsequently to cook and eat with unconcealed gusto. I did not share his feast, much preferring the native "puchero," a stew of dried beef and rice, which, with hard biscuit and coffee, comprised our menu. The puchero, by the way, may be rice and dried beef, and very tough, or it may be beef and rice and potatoes and turnips and carrots and various other green vegetables that go to make a most palatable concoction. It may also be all this with fish replacing the beef, and remain toothsome.

Gradually we worked away from the level country into forest and smaller hills, and in these drier, upper sections toward the Cuchilla, after we left

Digitized by Google

our dugout, I had my first view of the famous algarrobo, the native's all-useful tree, from which he extracts drink and covering. Here, too, soaring over our heads or alighting with pendent, springy legs, were numerous of those ugly but very useful bird things, the turkey buzzard, which Peru protects as a common scavenger, Argentine and Brazil tolerate, and Chile mistakenly has banished.

If ever you make a hunt into the swampy interior of South America, take my advice and wear the comparatively hotter spiral cloth puttee, because woodticks are innumerable and infernal and attack the ankle, which they reach easily between shoe and the ordinary legging, whether it be of canvas or leather. Then there is also the jigger—another malignant insect that burrows into you, depositing its head to inflame your skin and harass your peace of mind while it goes off to grow another fester-breeding head, for the torment of the next traveller.

We had seen several small deer, river hogs, and many times a swimming animal whose head suggested otter, but which Pedro declared to be a fish-cat, to quote literally from the Spanish name he gave it. None of these I troubled, because they did not interest me, and we wanted no meat. Once a little deer, about the size of a fawn, and of a lightish brown colour, carrying spike horns, stood gazing at us long enough for me to snap-shot it with my camera, but this, like all the other such attempts in the almost continuous rain from December to April and poor light of the jungle, came to nothing in development. I find in these latter-day jaunts that I much prefer to photograph or to study strange

Digitized by Google

THE HUGE WHEELED DRAUGHT-CARTS OF THE ARGENTINE PAMPAS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

animal life than to shoot. So I never kill except the particular quarry I am seeking, or those strange to me for the purpose of closer acquaintance. But South America, during the rainy season, is a sad disappointment to the amateur photographer.

On this occasion I indeed had eyes for nothing but jaguar, and you may be sure that with Pedro's exciting stories fresh in mind, I passed under no tree in the jungle without first narrowly scrutinizing the overhanging limbs. The real jungle here differs very little, if at all, from tropical jungle the world over. There is the same primeval forest, the dense growth of smaller, younger trees, the rank, thorn-covered underbrush, all interlaced and bound together with creeping things of every length and thickness and twisting form. Below all is the swamp-like soil, and around you the dank, noisome, warm smell of steaming, fermenting vegetation.

The section we hunted seemed made to order for jaguar. The river with its plentiful food to the east, dense jungle and higher hills on the west, and beyond, the more open country where the deer roamed. Far into the jungle we heard no bird note or any other sound by day, but at night it seemed as though the trees, the mud and the air surrounding us were alive with creaking, rasping things. And, however far we penetrated, we never got beyond the woodtick zone or that of the mosquitoes, which became numerous to distraction.

Pedro ceased to be a guide once we got into the jungle and became instead a much bullied and disrespected master of hounds. At times he would put me on edge with a sudden, low, drawn-out *hiss-s-s-ss;*

Digitized by Google

upon which, only my patient, alert hunter's soul knows how many anxious minutes I would spend scanning with painful closeness every tree in the vicinity. Then forward without a word. Again a sharp, short *hist* would stop me in my tracks with visions of jaguar directly overhead. And again I would move on unrewarded. Pedro was a well-meaning, but a somewhat disconcerting element, and pleased me most when he was out of sight, as he was for more than half the time, concealed by the high, rank growth through which we worked. Always I studied the bare spots carefully for signs of jaguar and several times found ample evidence on nearby trees of his visits to the locality, in deep, oblique scars, where he had reached high and dug his claws into the bark, as every member of the cat family will do, to smooth ragged claw edges—and not to sharpen them, we read. One tree I saw was deeply scarred with slanting lines a foot in length, where tigre had been at work.

But scars were all that rewarded our search for jaguar on that trip.

We hunted diligently and widely, yet to find our quarry without dogs was one chance in a hundred; and we were as good as being without dogs, for those we brought from Pedro's house, to which his well-disposed neighbours had contributed, were absolutely useless. While we were on the river they spent their time and energy chasing the teru-tero; and when we entered the jungle, woodticks absorbed every particle of their time and energy.

For the woodtick, it seems, dearly loves dog even better than it does man.

Returning to the river with hope of jaguar aban-

Digitized by Google

doned, I easily killed a bushy-back ant bear after noting its queer jumpy trot; a tapir browsing beside a small, deep stream; and a swamp deer; but none of them afforded sport. In fact, if your idea of sport is beyond the mere killing of things, there isn't much for you here but the birds, as the conditions make hunting a mere potting after happening upon your quarry. By this method I shot several small deer, one with six points, the others having only a pair of spikes, and most of them dark gray; three cavies, a twelve to fifteen-pound rabbit-like animal; and a "carpincho," as the uninteresting and stupid capybara is known in this part of South America.

The greatest sport I had, and, to my mind, the best in all the Argentine, was bola hunting the local "ostrich" (*Rhea Americana*) on the pampas. Although getting near enough I was too unskilled in throwing the bolas to score, but I had all the fun of an exhilarating gallop. The *rhea* is also stalked with a rifle, and is always hard to get on account of its wariness. Also I had great sport with the shotgun on several kinds of the curassow or grouse-like family (some of them great runners) and particularly on a bird about guinea-hen size called "pavo del monte" (wood turkey) by the natives. Had I been able to take the time I could have done equally well on ducks, of which there are thousands of many species up and down the river.

But you need a good dog—a rattling good retriever—else you'll lose half you shoot.

Digitized by Google

CHAPTER XIX

OUTFITTING FOR JUNGLE TRAVEL

It is a rash man who waxeth didactic on the subject of camp equipment. The wise wilderness traveller, which is to say the experienced one, does not dogmatize; but the tyro who ventures into the jungle without drawing upon the knowledge of those who have it, is foolish beyond hope of saving.

The kit is largely an expression of personal prejudice, which a veteran will not indulge too freely and never at the expense of efficiency. But to separate the wheat from the chaff among the multitudinous and confusing array of impedimenta offered by well-meaning advisers and alluring advertisements, requires a cold heart and a discriminating hand. Even among the " old guard " kits and outfits vary according to conditions, temperament, and the nature or locality of experience.

Whatever the conditions and whatever the adventure or however erratic the temperament, two features, however, are common to the genuinely experienced—namely, adequate equipment so far as transportation permits, and the best bed possible at the nightly camp. No one thing is more surely indicative of the campaigner than the bed; which, whether for a single night or a week, he invariably makes as comfortable as conditions and his skill will allow. The man who does not sleep well and eat well does not stand up under hardships or travel far. In a word, I may indeed say, that the test of experience is to ex-

Digitized by Google

tract rude comfort and clean camps out of the material at hand, however unpromising.

The man who unnecessarily cuts his equipment to needless limitations, abandoning simple and legitimate camp comforts under the impression that he is simulating the veteran, proclaims his novitiate. Theodore Roosevelt, with characteristic clarity, places this type among the "harmless defectives" who should not enter the woods without a guardian; and Stewart Edward White refers often in his several outdoor classics to the vainglorious tenderfoot who denies himself when transportation is ample, and puts aside actual necessities in the spirit of bravado. Such a one exhibits neither the attributes of the wilderness traveller nor of the man of sense. He is just plain silly, doing what is expected of the veriest beginner.

It demands neither hardihood nor experience, for example, to leave at home the extra pair of shoes. Apropos of which false attitude, I recall vividly certain groups of volunteers whom I found with beds made down in the mud before Santiago, though brush in abundance grew all round. They scouted my suggestion to lay a deep bed of brush before spreading their blankets as an action unworthy a soldier, professing to regard such precaution as effeminate; even chaffing me, "an old campaigner," for thought of it. Later, a considerable percentage of these men were laid up with fever, superinduced by sleeping on the rain-soaked ground. There was nothing soldierly in such stupidity—if the truth be told, indeed, it was unsoldierly—for it is no small part of the volunteer's duty to keep fit.

Equipment is governed by where you are going

Digitized by Google

and how; and, as I say, the man of experience builds his outfit accordingly. Under conditions of comparatively open country and unrestricted transportation he will indulge himself. Thus, in India, I have attended tiger and rhino hunting junkets embracing three or four hundred beaters and upwards of a hundred elephants, where tables, chairs, valets, jams, even champagne and bathtubs, were the camp rule. In Africa, where carts and hundreds of porters are possible, creature comforts which would be classed as luxuries elsewhere in the average hunter's camp are articles of common supply. Nor is such luxurious equipment in such environment indicative of the dilettante, as the near-hunter is prone to think. It is merely carrying out to a logical degree the campaign principle that one should always do for himself the best possible in the circumstances. According to carriage make your outfit as extensive as you please so long as it continues appropriate.

The truth is that the actual personal kit of the experienced man is always simple and varies little either in quality or scope—whatever the transportation facilities.

As bearing on this averment I am tempted to quote a paragraph from an entertaining article on "Kits and Outfits" Richard Harding Davis wrote for *Scribner's* in 1905, based on his observations while serving as war correspondent:

> In one war in which I worked for an English paper, we travelled like major-generals. . . . Everyone travelled with more than he needed and more than the regulations allowed, and each correspondent was advised that if he represented

Digitized by Google

a first-class paper and wished to "save his face" he had better travel in state. When the army stripped down to work, all this was discontinued, but at the start I believe there were carried with that column as many tins of tan leather dressing as there were rifles. On that march my own outfit was as unwieldy as a gypsy caravan. It consisted of an enormous cart, two oxen, three Basuto ponies, one Australian horse, three servants and four hundred pounds of supplies and baggage. When it moved across the plain it looked as large as a Fall River boat. Later, when I joined the opposing army and was not expected to maintain the dignity of a great London daily, I carried all my belongings strapped to my back and to the back of one pony; and I was quite as comfortable, clean and content as I had been with a private car and circus tent.

"Going light" is the touchstone of experience. It is also a bone of ceaseless contention among hunters whose interpretations range and differ as widely as their experiences—and inexperiences. There is going light and going light—according to means of transportation and whether you are planning merely a camping trip or an adventure into the wilderness. So very much depends on circumstances as to make hard and fast rules impertinent.

Whatever I write here is out of my own experience and observation with no disposition to proclaim my conclusions inerrable; and in no sense to lay down the law. I have gone "light" on forty-five pounds with a single horse; again on some of my exploration hunting trips from the base of supplies, I have taken less than twenty pounds. It all depends, as I say, where you are going, and how, and for what.

Writing of the interior and not of its edges where

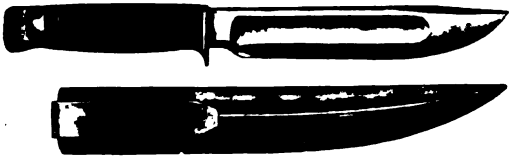
Digitized by Google

in many places travel by horse or even by bullock cart is possible, jungle travel is either on foot or by canoe. In the deep jungle of South America and of the Far East, you find your way along the water courses or on portage; or you wind slowly through the rank entangling undergrowth of the great forest often only by help of your machete.

I need not say your outfit must be assembled according to whether the journey is to be by canoe and horse, or by canoe alone; and whether the route is broken by portages, rapids or cataracts. Nine-tenths of the travel in the deep jungle, however, is by canoe or on foot, and in either case equipment must be reduced to the lightest. I have been able to keep my personal outfit under such conditions within dimensions that easily fitted into a waterproof canvas bag which might be packed on my own back across the portage. Travelling by horse, I have found nothing so serviceable as a strip of waterproof canvas—about the length of a single blanket and a foot wider—fitted with an inside flap pocket in which to stow extra clothing and such valuables as films and note-books. Closely rolled, this can be handily carried behind your saddle. And in packing blankets and duffle generally, it is well always to make a running noose knot in the tie rope that you may loosen quickly in case of emergency.

Most of my jungle canoeing has been in the rainy season when to keep provisions dry is the chief end sought. For this purpose I advise a tarpaulin—and buy it in your home city; I paid thirty dollars for a ten-dollar piece at Para, in Brazil. For yourself, be prepared to be thoroughly soaked much of the

Digitized by Google



A "MARBLE" HUNTING KNIFE—NOTE THE STRAIGHT LINE OF BLADE BACK AT POINT

THE PRESTON MESS-KIT ASSEMBLED

THE PRESTON MESS-KIT AND HALF-SIZE CANTEEN IN DETAIL

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

time if you penetrate the equatorial forest during the wet months. You simply cannot escape; it's part of the tropical game. In the canoe, my Indians always stripped to a loin cloth during rain, and I finally adopted the same course as the most practical solution of "keeping dry." Clothes were chiefly serviceable as protection against the sun. The thickly growing, aggressively armed thorn brush forbade our stripping in the forest, and even a water-logged shirt has protective qualities all its own. The much touted rubber poncho is a poor thing for the tropics, in my opinion; it is hot and it is not waterproof. The one real waterproof I've ever discovered is the "slicker" (oilskin), which is possible only for the saddle in comparative open going, or on boat when you are travelling more or less at ease.

For my individual use on inland travel, I've never found anything I like so well as the Preston Mess Kit, which has two fry pans (also possible as stew pans), a cup (answering as well for coffee pot), a knife and fork and spoon fitted round a half-size canteen, leaving space for emergency rations, and all enclosed in a canvas case with canvas strap for slinging over the shoulder. As I invariably carry a knife on my belt, I replace the one of the canteen by a toothbrush and comb—when travelling light—thus having both toilet and mess kit in compact form —a desideratum when everything must be toted on your back.

In clothes and shoes, I have found khaki and canvas unquestionably the best; though do not wear half (low) shoes in an insect-infested country without the spiral cloth puttee, which will help to keep the

Digitized by Google

woodtick family from getting under your trousers. When leggings are used I advise the army pattern; they are simple and durable. The canvas shoe is a long way the most desirable, because it does not hold water like one of leather and comes nearer to drying —nothing once wet ever really dries in the jungle interior without fire.

Physicians and the majority of campers agree upon wool for drawers and socks under all climatic conditions, but the only time I ever used wool was when I snowshoed after musk oxen in the Arctics; you probably won't wear either socks or drawers while you are paddling in tropical rainy season. Light gray flannel is the best for the shirt, and you should carry also a light flannel coat, as there is often a damp chill in the air which is apt to be dangerous after a long-continued downpour, and light flannel pajamas.

If you can get them, there is nothing round camp to equal the "alpargata," the sandal shoe of the Venezuelan native; otherwise take a pair of easy slippers or old shoes with the counters cut off. You will find them a great comfort. In fact, it's one of the luxuries in which I indulge myself, even if I have to cut down on some of the necessities. Another item in the same class is a bandanna handkerchief, which has many uses apart from the conventional one.

A hammock is the bed of the tropics and indispensable because it is the cleanest and the easiest procured; and to carry a cot in a canoe or on a horse is impracticable. Comfortable sleeping, however, rests upon its being properly hung. Nine men out of ten not South American born string the hammock too taut, *i.e.*, they tie the ends too far apart. Cor-

Digitized by Google

Photo. by G. M. L. Brown

A VENEZUELAN WAYSIDE RESTING PLACE OF THE BEST CLASS

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

rectly swung it should show quite a bow in the centre, more of the letter U shape than is usually allowed by the unskilled, in order that you may lie diagonally across it. A strip of table oilcloth, three yards long and one and a half wide, with socket at each end for the stretchers, provides a fairly waterproof awning for your hammock during moderate rain.

If you are travelling by the main rivers on boats large enough to accommodate a cot, it is, of course, a very desirable addition which you may discard when you come to your canoe. Several excellent ones are made especially for tropic travel, the most complete being the "bed oriental," of Levy Frères & Co., Paris, with uprights that serve either for the mosquito netting or the waterproof. Such an affair is too heavy except for steamer or caravan travel, and not to be thought of in a canoe, or even in a bateláo, unless it be a large one or without cargo. By all means take along a cot should you do any steamer touring on tropical rivers; and the "Gold Medal" is the handiest folding pattern I have used.

Sleeping on ground or rock or the bottom of a canoe is hard sleeping at best, but may be eased a bit. It is most comfortable, of course, to rest on your back, but you need the refreshment of turning on the side occasionally; and such a position can be eased by extending the under elbow at right angles from the body, stretching out the under leg at full length and drawing up the top leg—bent at the knee. Thus the body has the triangular support of the knee of the upper leg, the muscles of the under thigh and the under arm; all of which relieves the hip bone. Do not make your

Digitized by Google

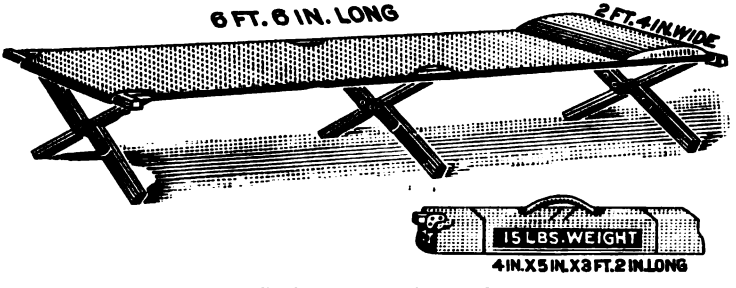
pillow too high. High pillows strain the neck muscles and throw more pressure on the hip bone; and if you are in a narrow dugout, don't spread the canvas sheet under your blanket to the very edges of the floor, as the water coming over the side will thus be caught and drained into your bed, whereas, if you leave a space between the sides of your bed and the insides of the canoe, the water will trickle to the keel.

Some people like the sleeping bag. I don't; neither for the arctics nor the tropics; it is either too cold or too hot and never cleanly. On my winter musk ox hunt, I started into the Barren Grounds with a bag made of caribou and lined with rabbit skin, the very warmest robe possible, but I ripped it open before I had been on the road three days. No less distinguished an explorer than Peary does not favor the bag for his personal use. But if you want a sleeping bag, try a wool one, which Fiala, the Arctic explorer, has recently patented; it appears to me the least objectionable of any I have seen; though I cannot imagine any one using a sleeping bag in the stewing tropics.

Before leaving the personal equipment subject, I must allude to one article—a chair—which sounds luxurious, but that has given me more real joy on long trips than any single article of my outfit. After a hard day in the saddle, or of continuous paddling, the pleasure of sitting in a chair is very considerable. Whenever possible, I include one: the same one and the best—a takedown model I first saw in India, where it originated, and is still called the "roorkee," but which is now made in England, where it may be bought at the Army and Navy stores. It can be rolled

Digitized by Google

THE "ROORKEE" TAKEDOWN CAMP CHAIR WHICH THE AUTHOR HAS CARRIED AROUND THE WORLD AND CONSIDERS THE BEST MODEL OF ITS KIND



THE GOLD MEDAL FOLDING COT

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

into a comparatively small parcel, about 17 x 7 inches, and is really a comfortable armchair for camp or steamer.

Every hunter has his own ideas as to pots, pans and the like, so I will suggest only two items—the iron tripod cooking stand; and the cuia, or calabash, as the gourd bowl is called, which, in size from a cup to a big basin, is lighter and stands more knocking than any camp utensil I know. Curiously enough, firewood in the tropics, even in the midst of the great forest, does not come easily to hand, so you need to make what you get go far, and for this purpose the tripod is unexcelled.

I never make a journey without a collapsible lantern and a collapsible canvas bucket. For the former I use what are known as sick-room candles, which, however, require a larger socket you must have fitted, and should be packed in a strong box, so they are protected against pressure. Of course, the most satisfactory light is given by kerosene should you be able to have it.

A first-class filter—there are not so many on the market—and a brush to clean it after usage is a necessity, but keep in mind that the filter is only cleansing and not purifying; therefore, if the water is doubtful, be on the safe side and boil it. Also put fresh water every night in the canteen you use even though you do not drink it all. It will be cooler next morning and freer from the sediment always present even after filtering. One grows careless in this respect and oftentimes circumstances do not admit of precaution. When you have been paddling hard all day under a pouring rain and tie up for night

Digitized by Google

at the bank where no opportunity offers of making fire, you are rather apt to drink the water as you find it. There were days, and sometimes weeks, at a stretch on some of my river journeys in South America and in Sumatra when I did not boil the water because I could not make a fire. And it is my good fortune never to have paid the penalty, which may easily be heavy, of such neglect.

Entirely as a tribute to my palate, I carry coffee when I can and tea when I must in the tropics; and both must be kept in water-tight tin cans as well to preserve them against upset as for protection under rainfall, which not on occasion will amount to a foot of precipitation in one storm. To anyone canoeing in the rainy season my advice is to always make an extra quantity so you will have some on hand for days when, as is often the case, building fire is not possible. If you can be certain of a fire once a day it will be a good average, and there are days at a time when you will not be able to cook at all.

Eschew the patent cigar lighter and its fuse. They may be all right on a steamer, but they are useless in the damp jungle. Have a canvas "fire bag," as it is called in the Far North country, that you can attach to your belt or put in pocket for your pipe, tobacco and matches in daily use, keeping the balance of your supply in waterproof sacks. And get both tobacco and matches of native make; it's the only kind that will withstand the climate. Keep your pipe clean, but do not scrape the inside or take out the "button." I discovered I did not smoke as much in the tropics, particularly in the rainy season, as in the temperate or Arctic zones.

Digitized by Google

In my individual ditty bag, in addition to the usual small housewife, I always carry one of those tools-in-the-handle kits, a small whetstone, a spool of medium-sized copper wire, a pair of cutting pliers and a stout fishline. The tools-in-handle kit I have found most handy, scarcely a day passing without its serving; and nothing is so all-round useful in camping and travelling as copper wire. In a waterproof canvas bag that may be slung from the shoulder I place notebooks, field glasses and compactly rolled toilet articles, including razor and tube of the incomparable shaving cream "Euxesis," which requires neither water nor a brush. If you are a wearer of spectacles (and don't try to use eyeglasses in jungle travel) have the large round lenses set in aluminum frames, with a thin cork cushion under the bridge, and rubber tubing enclosing the arms where they fit around the ears. Of course, you should take along one extra pair at least, in a strong case.

A spool of the dental floss, which comes in a metal cylinder, is the only practical form for the traveller, among the many that will be offered by the druggist. In this bag also is such literature as I may be fortunate enough to find opportunity to read, of which there is not a great deal in rainy season travel through the jungle, though I am never without hope or the material. Watch and compass I carry in trousers pockets, at the end of lanyards fastened to my belt; also a stout but medium size utility jack-knife.

I do not use a tent in the jungle, but spread a tarpaulin in the wet and a stout fly in the dry season—make it double when you can.

In the matter of provisions—here again the char-

Digitized by Google

acter of the trip must influence choice. I am one of those wilderness travellers who always lives the best he can as long as he can. I adapt myself to conditions. Whenever the transportation enables me to carry along a cot, I take it, and when the transportation affords opportunities for a comparatively elaborate menu, I go the limit. Otherwise, it is my habit to live on the country, that is, to eat what the natives eat, having found that to be the only way to make extended exploration in really untravelled regions. On many divisions of the Road it would have been utterly impossible for me to carry outside supplies and equally impossible to prepare them. Mandioca and dried fish comprise the local food and that is what the adventurer to the unfrequented sections in that land must depend upon. There are parts of the Road upon which provisions may be carried—for example, on the lower Orinoco, the lower Rio Negro and the Parana, where I included rice as the most satisfying; you can carry more of it and it goes farther and suits you better than any other fare. Beans are a favourite of mine, but not for canoe travel in the rainy tropics; they are too long cooking. In Far Eastern jungles I relied upon rice, with dried peas as a side dish.

In short, the staples for tropical small canoe travel are coffee, rice, dried fish, mandioca—and beans if you can take time to prepare them. Canned goods are impossible for this kind of travel, but if you journey on waters open to a large boat, they may be carried, though I do not favour them for the tropics.

Whenever I can arrange a menu to suit me, it consists of beans, rice, fish and fruit; a very little meat

Digitized by Google

and, where to be found, that little of turtle or the grass-eating manati. If like me, you will not much care for soup in hot countries, but the German ebswurst is hard to beat as an emergency ration.

Whether or not you use sugar and tobacco, you should add as much of each as you conveniently can for barter. Tobacco especially is better than money.

Another article equally important is limes, which are a great bracer when you are feeling feverish or "done." Some hot water, lime juice and a little rum make a very effective pick-me-up for the tropics; though pick-me-ups are not to be dallied with here unless you really need them. I should advise a good, stiff, straight lemonade every day, whether you think you require it or not. It's excellent for the stomach. Indeed, the medicinal value of limes is not half appreciated—one should never be without them in the tropics. But leave the spirits alone unless you feel decidedly chilly after a wetting, and even then hot coffee or tea is better for you.

You should have waterproof bags for provisions as well as for clothing, and if you wish to save time and gray hairs, put your different kinds of provisions in separate, differently coloured sacks, or give each sack a distinguishing mark so you can readily recognize and find what you seek. This saves hours on a trip and makes life a little more endurable when you are pitching camp in the rain.

Powdered coffee is the easiest to carry and the simplest and quickest for usage. You put the coffee in a cloth strainer and pour the boiling water over it, thus needing no mill and having hot water for other purposes. It simplifies the equipment. I also take

Digitized by Google

along some powdered chocolate, which is thankfully consumed when you are shy a meal or two. Of native things, the cheese is wholesome and satisfying, and I suggest stocking up on it whenever there is the opportunity.

Once a week, if you can, give everything a good sun bath—all your provisions and all your equipment—unfailingly if you are on an extended journey. This is as true of the dried fish as it is of the clothing. On the other hand, do not you yourself at any time take the sun for long, especially on the back. If you have to sit in the sun, face it if possible.

Every wilderness adventurer should familiarize himself with simple medicinal remedies and elemental surgery. He ought to know how to treat burns and bruises and wounds and snake bites. He must know how to make a tourniquet, and that it should be applied between the wound and the heart when the blood is bright red and comes in spurts, but on the side of the wound farthest from the heart when the blood is dark and flows steadily. He ought always to carry a medicine kit arranged under the advice of a physician who has first hand knowledge of the tropics.

In this kit should be something for quick action against chills and fever and constipation and diarrhea; scissors, tourniquet, tweezers, carbolized vasoline, in addition, of course, to dressings such as sterilized gauze and roller bandages. And last, but not least, a roll of one-inch adhesive plaster, equally serviceable in mending your gun stock or shoes, as in patching your face, and with the advantage over electrician tape of being medicated.

Carbolic soap is safest to use and arnica leaves

Digitized by Google

make the best lotion for bruises and are easily carried. Also include collodion or a tube of new skin; it is invaluable for protecting wounds against dirt. If you are making your first trip, take along something like Jamaica ginger for stomach instead of using rum or chlorodyne; and I never go without blue ointment as vermin preventive and exterminator.

Quinine is the common fever preventive. When I first went into the jungle I was told to take five grains daily, but never followed that advice, although it has given satisfaction to many others. My plan is to leave myself alone if I feel all right; when I feel feverish I take from twenty to twenty-five grains in two doses, fifteen at night and ten in the morning. In other words, my scheme is to knock the ailment when it comes rather than to keep filtering medicine into my system. Never have I been laid up by fever so I could not travel, although I've felt very seedy.

Also I strongly advise a cup of black, strong coffee the first thing on awakening in the morning, before you stir around.

Snake bites, while always a possibility, are not a probability, despite popular belief to the contrary. However, you should be prepared for the exception that proves the rule. Open the clothing and expose the point of attack without delay. Quickly apply a tourniquet above the bite to partly stop the circulation, so the venom will not be carried into the system. Then with a sharp knife (there should be a scalpel with a closing blade in your medicine kit) lay open the skin just where the snake's fangs have struck, cutting outward and lengthwise of the limb. Don't make a pin prick;

Digitized by Google

make a fair, free cut, letting the blood run for a few seconds to wash out the poison. Sucking the wound answers the same purpose (be sure there are no scratches or cuts on your lips in this case). Wash out the wound with whiskey or other spirits, if at hand, or boiled, cool water. After this rub some permanganate of potash into the wound. Do not take off the tourniquet for some little time, and then remove it and put it on again at short intervals. Finally dress the wound as any other. The sting of scorpions, tarantulas, centipedes, should be treated in a similar manner, though so large a wound need not be made, as the poison is not virulent.

The chief things to remember in such surgery are (1) to keep your hands clean, (2) to put no dressing on the wound which is not clean and antiseptic, and (3) to use no unboiled water. You should always carry bichloride tablets, with which a solution is made for the washing of wounds as well as mere irritations, which are susceptible to infection.

Infection from insect bite you are sure to encounter and it is *always* to be taken seriously. It is most important to keep any wound clean. Therefore, to those visiting insect-infested tropics, I say with greatest emphasis, resist, at all cost of effort, the temptation to scratch and so save yourself untold trouble and possible blood poisoning. To keep from scratching will require every bit of fortitude you possess, but if you do scratch, you not only immeasurably increase the itching and the irritation and the swelling, but you lay yourself liable to infection. You cannot depend on any "dope" to protect you against insect pest—not against the real

Digitized by Google

insect plague if you get into it. I have tried many kinds many times in Siam, in Malaya, where are some of the most noisome jungles in the Far East, and in South America, but never with success. I refer to the pest at its worst; if you are making a short excursion into the outer edges of the jungle, or on the llanos, or can keep the middle of the big rivers, the insects are not troublesome. Under such conditions, I have found a preparation of two parts pure olive oil and one part tar to be moderately useful.

The "best" battery offers a theme for never ending discussion; it is a subject upon which hunters perhaps agree least. There are so many different rifles, all good, and so many different loads and calibres of so nearly equal efficiency, that the choice is wide. I presume I am a bit old-fashioned in my prejudices, as being one of those hunters who do not believe in going afield with a rifle which carries a mile for game never seen over seventy-five or one hundred yards distant. I confess that for deer, elk or moose, I prefer the older style of cartridge, the one carrying a big, sickening lump of lead which does not journey into the next county—but stops in the quarry. If, however, you expect to meet really dangerous game in the jungle—lion, tiger, the seladang of Malaya, elephant, Cape buffalo or the rhino—the more smashing power your gun has the better for you and your friends.

In the first line of defence against such game nothing equals the cordite .450 and .500 double-barrelled express rifles of English make, though W. A. Chanler, Kermit Roosevelt, Stewart E. White and several more American sportsmen have scored in Africa on

Digitized by Google

the biggest game with American rifles of smaller calibre, such as the Winchester and others. But these demand a better target, usually unobtainable in dense cover, and consummate marksmanship.

In South America there is no dangerous game except the jaguar, and he is not so very dangerous, for, like most of the cat family, he will usually retire if there is the chance, and as an almost invariable rule fights only when, cornered or maddened by wounds, he meets you in close quarters. South America is not a game country so far as animals are concerned; apart from the jaguar, there are the tapir, several kinds of deer and the peccaries. Some, I am told, class the guanaco as game, but I should about as soon think of shooting a camel as one of those creatures or any of its kindred—the alpaca and the vicuna.

If you go into a given section with a definite purpose of jaguar or of deer, you will carry the rifle which most pleases you. Any of the high-grade American rifles is quite strong enough for the jaguar, if your bullet mushrooms well; but you must shoot straight and hit hard, for, as I say, it is a beast which is formidable on occasions and then takes a lot of killing. The tapir affords no sport. It's extremely shy, frequents the rivers and is a strong swimmer, but if you are in want of meat, it will supply you with a fairly palatable piece.

The real sport of South America is supplied by its birds, among which are many members of the partridge, grouse, snipe and pheasant-like families ranging wide—and in season wild fowl by the multitudes. No sportsman, of course, shoots the birds of plumage. The best of sport is afforded by the *rhea*

Digitized by Google

or Argentine ostrich, hunted with dogs, and the bolas which the natives throw with great skill.

When you can carry but one rifle and are likely to come across birds, deer or possibly jaguar, I advise the pump gun because it shoots both shot and ball fairly well. This gun constituted my armory for much of my South American jungle travel; and when I could pack it I added a Mannlicher 9 mm. (.3546 calibre). Percy C. Madeira has been most successful with the 8 millimeter. If your rifle leads drop a small quantity of mercury into the barrel, then plug and shake. The lead can readily be removed after this treatment by a swab. You must keep your guns well oiled, and your camera films in tin cases.

For knife and ax, a Marble pattern is best suited to my requirements. The scalloped blade, after the alleged bowie model, is a miserable skinning knife, but useful on the tenderfoot belt for photographic purposes. The genuine butcher blade is the ideal.

In going to South America let me urge that you include a butterfly net if you are at all interested in studying at close hand those beautiful winged creatures, of which the varieties are countless.

As to expenses, that again is a question of where you are going and how you go. Mine, by and large, averaged from one hundred to three hundred dollars a month, though it is only fair to add that I was always obliged to keep within a limited time and a given small amount of money—hence I was by sheer necessity compelled to put my outfit on the simplest working basis practicable—shorn of all luxuries.

Speaking of luxuries, it is rather interesting, I think, to know and to record here that even the har-

Digitized by Google

diest veteran hunter among us always has in mind some cherished article outside of fundamentals for which he hopes to find room in his outfit and which he does include unless his equipment is restricted to actual necessities, such as food and the essentials of fire-making and travel. Thus, under "going light" conditions, Col. Theodore Roosevelt says that his first item of luxury would be "floss silk for the teeth," and adds that "tea I would consider almost a necessity for a long trip." Stewart Edward White, who, like the Colonel, has hunted in Africa as well as in America, declares for "more syrup." Charles Sheldon, a notable example of the self-reliant, competent wilderness traveller and hunter, as his books of Alaskan adventures indicate, says that aside from the necessities, such as food, etc., there are "two special things I insist on taking into the woods—one is an Alpine Ruchsack; this perhaps would not be classified as a luxury. The other, on the contrary, is distinctly one. I always bring with me an *extra fine* quality of tea."

Dr. Wm. Lord Smith, who has made a specialty of hunting tigers over all the world, says that where he has done most of his shooting, in Asia and Africa, "porters are cheap and plenty and my luxury would be a portable tub with plenty of hot water to fill it." The dean of big game hunters is unquestionably the Englishman, F. C. Selous, who, now in his sixtieth year, is, as I write (December, 1911), on his way to the Lorian Swamp in East Africa. None has had so long or so continuous experience in the hunting field as he, so that what he says as to a first choice of a luxury is worth quoting at length:

Digitized by Google

"Personally I have no fad or fancy for any small luxury, as I learnt to travel very light in my early days of African hunting and for twenty years never carried even a tooth-brush, as I used to clean my teeth as the natives did with a piece of wood. I had to live entirely out of the country and found that in the way of food I required fat and sugar in addition to lean meat, and what I could buy from the natives in the way of native corn, meal or rice. The first I obtained from the larger animals, elephants, hippos, white rhinoceroses, giraffes and elands, and I rendered out large quantities in the early part of the dry season for use during the later months when all animals were in low condition. The second—sugar—I obtained from wild honey, which was unusually plentiful. All my life I have been a teetotaller and a non-smoker and I have never carried a single bottle of brandy even for medicine. Putting aside all food, matches and necessary clothing equipment, the one thing I would always take with me on any trip, in either a hot or a cold country, before anything else, would be tea. I am not very particular as to the kind of tea I get and I think it is the hot drink more than anything else which I like. I like my tea with sugar and milk when I can get it, but even when I have to drink it without any adjunct I find it a great comfort, and should miss it very much if I had to do without it altogether."

Richard Harding Davis, our eminent war correspondent, who as such has trekked the globe over, writes me, in reply to my request for his first choice of luxury:

"A luxury if you want it badly enough becomes a necessity. My idea of both is a Forbes chair, or, as you call it and as it is often called, the roorkee chair; and books to read on rainy days, on days when you are kept in camp waiting for fresh supplies or remounts or reinforcements, or just because you are lazy."

Digitized by Google

For myself, talcum powder has always been the first real luxury to go into my pack. But on all my trips, wherever they may be and whatever the season, the two things which invariably have my first, and last and continuous best thoughts are—

(1) To keep my stomach normal, and,

(2) To keep my feet in good condition.

These I consider the two most important essentials to wilderness travel however or wherever it be. Indeed, to keep my feet sound, my mouth shut, and my eyes, ears and bowels open are my golden rules.

Finally, I will say, that in addition to suitable equipment and a sound constitution, the successful wilderness hunter must have also patience and courage and good temper; and the last is not the least important. Temperance I consider imperative.

Adventuring in the deep jungle is a plod, day after day—a hard plod. There is none of the interest and excitement of Africa's vast open game fields with something happening every hour to keep you enthused. Instead, there is the silent, forbidding forest—apparently deserted—where you need grim perseverance and enough experience to prevent panic if, one day in the untracked solitude, doubt of your bearings suddenly grips you.

Digitized by Google

INDEX

A

Acarigua, town, Venezuela, 251.
Agouti, edible rodent, Brazil, 57.
Algarrobo tree, 286.
Alpargata, Venezuelan sandal, 227.
Altar Pass, 248.
Amazon River, extent, 16; character of banks, 17.
Andre, Eugene, 135; on Caura, 184.
Anhinga-snake bird, 68.
Ant-eater or bear, 82, 186, 289.
Ants, visitations, 42; march of, stings, 55–57; adventure with, 186; ferocity, industry, 239.
Apure River, west tributary, lower Orinoco, high water marks, 121; extent, 248; flood land, 263.
Arauca River, west tributary, lower Orinoco, 213; flood land, 263.
Arrows, native, 145.
Atabapo River, south tributary, upper Orinoco, 109.
Atures, north port, Orinoco cataracts, 135, 192.

B

Barcellos, town, Brazil, 20.
Barquisimeto, town, Venezuela, 247.
Bateláo, cargo craft, 28; propelling, 34.
Bates, on turtles, 204.
Bats, 61, 125.
Bed, hanging a hammock, 296; cots, 297; sleeping position, 297; pillows, 298; bags, 298.
Bees, "Angelitos," 38.
Bingham, Prof. Hiram, route Bogotá, 251; jabiru stork, 264.
Birds, lower Negro, 39–40; of swamp voices, 53; snake bird (anhinga), 63; drumming, 80; scarcity at Rapids, 84, 198; upper Orinoco, 146, 191; lower Orinoco, 217; at water-holes, 234; on llanos, 245; along Portuguesa, 257–262; egret killing, 261; at Atures, 263; on Feliciano, 284; hooded in Argentine, 285; bell bird, campanero, 248–249.
Bittern, 125.
Blow-gun, "Sarabatana," 145.
Boats, see canoe.
Bolívar, town, Venezuela, 212.
Bombilla, 279.
Bongo, see canoe.
Bows, native, 145.
Branco River, north tributary, lower Rio Negro, 19, 123.
Brazil nut, 26.
Bushmaster, 59.
Butterflies on Negro, 40; a marvel, 105.

C

Cababuri River, north tributary, lower Negro, 64.
Cachaca, Brazil, 43; uses, 69.
Cactus, 231.
Cagua, town, Venezuela, 247.
Caicara, settlement, Venezuela, 214.
Caiman, 211; see crocodile.
Cakouri, 95.
Calabash, Spanish, 42; also gourd; also Cuia in Brazil; uses, 237.

Digitized by Google

Calaboso, llanos "metropolis," Venezuela, 248.
Calentura, 193; see fever.
Camanaos, beginning bad rapids where Negro turns north, 66.
Campanero, voice, 248–249; see bell bird.
Campo, 18.
Caño, Venezuela; igarapee, Brazil; 47; connecting rivers, 115; size, current, 121.
Canoe, types; uba, canoa, curiara, dugout, bongo, falca, montaria; 28.
Capybara, Brazil, 58; same as Carpincho, Argentine, 289.
Caribe, bloodthirsty fish, 263.
Caribs, Indians, 114; ancient road of, 135, 184.
Caroni River, south tributary, lower Orinoco, 135.
Carne seca, dried meat, 252; toughness of, 191.
Casiquiare River, connecting Orinoco and Negro, 116, 129; character, 131.
Cassava, 191.
Cassique, 39; also japim and oriole.
Castro, freebooter, 219.
Caucho, 20.
Caura River, south tributary, lower Orinoco, 115.
Cavy, 289.
Caxoeiras, rapids, Brazil; raudales, Venezuela, 64.
Ceiba tree, 49, 231.
Chair for camp, 298.
Chanler, W. A., rifle of, 307.
Chapman, Frank, knowing eyes, 182.
Chinchorro, see hammock.
Chubasco, 216.
Chuchu, Argentine, 268; see fever.
Cicada, shrieking, 41.
Cigarettes, native, 75.
Clothes and shoes for jungle, 295–296.
Cloud effects, 218.
Cocui, 1000-foot rock on frontier between Brazil and Venezuela, 66, 94.
Cojedes, settlement, Venezuela, 248.
Conquistadores, seekers for fabled El Dorado, 113.
Cook outfit, 299.
Cougar, 228; curiosity, 225; lack of courage, 282–283.
Crocodile, voice, 191; disposition, 205; friendly encounter, 241.
Cuia, Brazil; also calabash and gourd, among Spanish speaking.
Curare, poison, power, 144; formula, 145.
Curassow, 234, 239, 289.
Curiosity, guard of wilderness traveller, 175.

D

Darts, blow-gun, 145.
Davis, Richard Harding, on kits, 292; first choice camp luxury, 311.
Deer, 232, 234, 244, 286, 289.
Ditmar, Raymond L., on crocodiles, 208.
Ditty bag, 301.
Dope fallacy, 130.
Doves, 198, 231, 234.
Drudgery, relief, 128.
Duane, Colonel, 249.
Ducks, 190, 198, 289.
Dugout, see canoe.
Duida, Mt., Venezuela, 135.

E

Egret, slaughter, 261; moulted plumage, 262; shambles, 263.
El Dorado, fabled land, 113; see also Conquistadores.

Digitized by Google

Equipment, jungle trekking afoot, 55, 160, 163; vocabulary, 124; in saddle, 226; beeswax for ticks, 238; suggestions on meeting wild life, 241; general, 290.
Esmeralda, mission, 137.
Expense, 309.
Explorers: Wallace, 66, 85, 98.
Andre, 135, 184.
Bingham, 251.
Conquistadores, seekers for the El Dorado, 113; Sir Walter Raleigh voyaged up the Orinoco to the Caroni, about 90 miles below present Ciudad Bolívar and only 180 miles from the Atlantic. See also Foreword, 3.
Humboldt, 98, 106, 190, 196.
Rice, 68, 85.

F

Facon, Gaucho knife, 269.
Falca, see canoe.
Farinha, Brazil; mandioca, Venezuela; native flour, 31; see mandioca.
Feliciano River, northeast tributary, Parana.
Fever, 193; preventive, 194, 305; to recognize mosquito, 238; chuchu, 268; washing water, 242.
Fiesta, 250.
Filter, 299; drinking, 300.
Fire flies, 285.
Fish, pirarucu, staple, 26; catching, 95; scarcity, 103; seasons, 117; absence in caño, 125; drumming, 190.
Flowers, in forest, 51; on llanos, 231, 245.
Flowing Road, 16–112.
Forest, vegetation, 47; luxuriance, parasites, 50, 53; awesomeness, 79; monotony, 190; along upper Orinoco, 146, 165; llanos in dry season, 230; sameness, 287.
Fox breeding, freaks, 224.
Frogs, anvil chorus, 43, 61, 125.
Fruit, lack of, Negro, 26.

G

Gallinule, 125, 234.
Gapo, flood land, 18.
Garrapata, Venezuela, 237; catching, 238; same as jigger, redbug, wood-tick; see insects.
Gato dance, 269.
Gaucho, overrated, 230, 269.
Geheta River, south tributary, upper Orinoco, 186.
Going light, 293.
Golden Rules, jungle, 312.
Gourd, 42; uses, 287; also calabash and cuia.
Gran chaco, Argentine forest, 266; Indians, 273.
Guacharaca, bird, 245.
Guahariboes, Indians, 144, 164, 169; alleged disposition, 178.
Guainia River, Brazil, 104; continuation Rio Negro.
Guaviare River, west tributary, upper Orinoco, 134.
Gunare, town, Venezuela, 252.

H

Hammock, 227; also chinchorro.
Heron, croaking, 53; stare, 59; as food, 124; soldado, 185, 190, 234.
Horse, Venezuela, bronco, 229.
Housewife, 301; see ditty bag.
Humboldt, Alexander von, 98, 106, 190, 196; on crocodiles, 211; on jaguars, 224.

I

Ibis, 262.
Igarapee, Brazil, 47; also caño.
Iguana, 59, 258, 285.
Indians, crew, 30; method work, 33; cheeriness, 36; family, Tupi,

Digitized by Google

character, skill, 37; diving, 72; mongrel, 75; improvidence, 68, 75, 108; nomadic, 90, 108, 140; patois, 116; not immune to insects, 131; similarity, 132; Maquiritares, 138, 142; honesty, 139; "White Indians," 142, 143; Guaharibos, 144; hair, costume, 157, 166, 169; alleged disposition, 178; Maipures and Atures, 194; superstition, 250; river wanderers, 252; gran chaco, 278; Argentine policy, 274.
Insects, Rio Negro, 42; lagoons, 55; Casiquiare, 129; preventive, 130; Orinoco, 185, 193; period of attack, 197; garrapata, 237; recognizing fever mosquito, 238; infection, 306.
Italian laborer, Argentine, 269.

J

Jabiru stork, 254.
Jacana bird, 63.
Jaguar (*Felis onca*) kill, 125; native fear, 126; fairy stories, 126; food, chance of meeting, 127, 195; variation, 222; black freak, 224; size, temper, range, method of hunting, 225; cave living, 243; toll of llaneros, 250; an encounter, 255–257; Argentine fancies, 280; as a swimmer and fisher, 281; attacking, 282; hunting with dogs, 283; tree scarring, 288.
Japim (*Cassicus persicus*), Brazil, 39; mimicry, 68; see Cassique.
Javita, north port of neck of land separating the Amazon and Orinoco river systems, 107.
Jesuit missions, 113–114.
Jen-jen, 193; see insects.
Jigger, 286; same as wood-tick, red-bug, garrapata; see insects.

K

Kilo, two and one-fifth pounds.
Kingfisher, 39, 198.
Kits, equipment, 290.

L

Lagoon, 54; changing size, 121.
Lantern, 299.
Leadership, qualities, 77, 91.
Leggings, 296.
Limes, medicinal, 303.
Lione, Venezuela, puma, 223, 244.
Lizard, steady gaze, 58.
Llanos, 228; character, 230–231–251; plants, flowers, 245; habitations, 245–246; llaneros life, 250.

M

Macaws, 40.
Madeira, Percy, rifle of, 307.
Madrugar, 84.
Maipures, south port great Orinoco cataracts, 135, 192.
Manaos, town, Brazil, 16.
Manati, Brazil, peixeboe or cow-fish, 25.
Manaviche River, north tributary, upper Orinoco.
Mandioca or mandioc, Venezuela, 81; preparation, 54; see also farinha, its Brazilian equivalent.
Mantilla, 271.
Mantua vs. hat, 271.
Maps, casual character, those made of South America, 65, 118; Rapids San Gabriel, 67.
Maquiritare Indians, 142–144.
Maracaibo, town, Venezuela, 219–220.
Maracaibo Lake, Venezuela, 230.
Marajo Island, Amazon, 16.
Maroa, town, Venezuela, 112, 117.
Mata mata turtle, 63.
Mecham, hunting platform, 238.
Medicines, emergency remedies, 304.

Digitized by Google

Melanism, 224.
Mess kit, individual, 295; see ditty bag.
Meta River, west tributary, lower Orinoco.
Mocovito Indians, Argentine, 273.
Monkey-howler, 200–234.
Montaria, see canoe.
Monté, 231.
Morgan, Henry, buccaneer, 219.
Mosquito, 130; to know fever breed, 238, 287; see insects.
Mountains, Curicuriari, characteristic along Negro, 65–66–68; Cababuri, 94; Duida, 133; Parima and Pacaraima Sierras, 134–135; Roraima, 135; Cuchilla Montiel, 283.

N

Natives, better country class, 24.
Near-hunters, potting out of trees, 126, 225; water-hole ambushing, 226; trophy snatching, 236.

O

Ocama River, north tributary, upper Orinoco.
Ocelot, 228; wanton killing, 225.
Orchid, 50.
Orinoco River, 184; character of upper, 136, 145, 153–154, 190, 189; lower course, 199.
Oriole (*Cassicus persicus*), 39; see also japim in Brazil and Cassique in Venezuela.
Ostrich of pampas (*Rhea Americana*), bolo hunting, 289.
Outfits, general, 290.

P

Paca, Brazil, edible rodent, 58, 108; see also agouti.
Packing basket, native, 79.
Packing, sacks of different colours, 303.
Padamo River, north tributary, upper Orinoco, 136.
Paddles, type, 29; method of using, 86; joy down stream work, 109.
Palm, berry-bearing, 56, 89.
Pampas, Argentine, 228, 267.
Pampero, Argentine, 277.
Panama hat, 227.
Paraguayan tea, 278; see Yerbà matè.
Parana River, 267.
Parana, town, Argentine, 275.
Parasite, on trees, 51, 230.
Parrakeets, 40, 231.
Parrots, 40; voice, 53, 190.
Parima, Pacaraima Mts., Venezuela, 135, 192.
Pátio, 220.
Patrón, 30.
Paujil, Venezuela, see curassow.
Pauxis, Strait of, Amazon, 17.
Pecil, Miguel, gentleman, 93.
Photographing, difficulties, disappointments, 61, 149, 186, 240, 286.
Piassava, 36; collecting, 118.
Pilot, Argentine, skill, 268.
Pimichin River, west tributary to Negro or Guainia as here called, 104.
Pipe, tobacco, matches, 300.
Pium, Brazil, 42; see insects.
Plata, Rio de la, 267.
Playa, Venezuela, 201.
Poncho, uselessness of, 295; woven, 270.
Portuguesa River, west tributary, Apure, character, 253; bird life, 262.
Posada, Venezuela, Inn.
Práctico, Brazil, 15; skill, 19; also pilot.
Provisions, 301.
Puchero, Argentine stew, 285.
Puerto Cabello, town, Venezuela.

Digitized by Google

Puerto, south port of land neck separating Orinoco and Amazon river systems, 104.
Puma, 223; lack courage, 282; see also cougar and lione.

R

Rail-birds, 234.
Rain, frequency of, 69; storm, 70, 85, 90, 96, 103, 125, 128, 146, 155, 180, 218, 264, 277; precipitation, 300.
Rancho, 250; poverty, 254; cheeriness, 260.
Rapids, Negro, 66; map, 67; crossing, 70.
Rations, jungle trekking on foot, 54; to increase pace, 95; allowance, Brazil, one kilo dried meat, one-half kilo dried fish per day per man; two kilos farinha, three days per man. One kilo coffee per man a week. Kilo is two and one-fifth pounds.
Red-bug, see garrapata.
Remanse, Brazil, 91.
Rice, Dr. Hamilton, 68, 85, 251.
Rifle, 125; choice of battery, 307.
Rio Negro, largest north tributary Amazon and one of its greatest feeders, 15, 19; character of lower course, 27; character of upper course, 83, 102.
Rivers, similarity in South America, 120–185; rise and fall, current, 188; affected by rain, 121; records, 122; colour, 122; down stream travel, 183.
Rodent family, see agouti, paca, capybara.
Roman, Father, 129.
Roosevelt, Kermit, rifle of, 307.
Roosevelt, Theodore, 291; first choice camp luxury, 310.
Roraima, Mt., Venezuela, 188.
Rubber hunting, 22.

S

Saddle, native, 230.
Salado River, west tributary, Parana, 266.
San Carlos, Venezuelan frontier post, 98; trade, 118.
Sancocho, Venezuelan stew, 246.
San Fernando on Apure, town, Venezuela, 262.
San Fernando on the Atabapo, town, Venezuela, 110; trade, 118.
San Gabriel, on divide between lower and upper Negro, at beginning of great rapids, 73.
San Jose, first of great Negro rapids, 64.
San Rafael, town, head of Portuguesa, 251.
Santa Fe, town, Argentine, 266.
Santa Isabel, head navigation on Rio Negro, 15; rubber headquarters, 22.
Sarabatana, blow-gun, 145.
Savannah, 164, 231.
Schedules, difficulty of making or keeping, 96, 124.
Selous, F. C., first choice camp luxury, 311.
Sheldon, Charles, first choice camp luxury, 310.
Simpatico, Venezuela, congenial, 143.
Slave traders, routes of 18th century, 116.
Smith, Dr. Wm. Lord, first choice camp luxury, 310.
Snakes, rapidity, 59; water boa, 62; attack and antidote, 107; land boa, 172; macaurel, 258; flee your path, 259.
Soldado, Venezuela heron, 185.
Southern Cross, 44.
Spiders, 90.
Spiritus frumenti, use of, 194.
Spoonbill, 190, 234, 262.
Squirrel, black, Venezuela, 234.

Digitized by Google

Stilt, 53, 234.
Sugar, for barter, 308.
Superstition, llanero, 250; Indian, 264.
Surgery in camp, 306.

T

Tapir, Brazilian, Malayan, 60.
Tegrillo, Venezuela, little tigre, 260.
Tegu-lizard, 58.
Temi River, south tributary Atabapo, 109.
Temperature, lower Negro, 41, 68, 72; upper Negro, 102, 103; upper Orinoco, 181; at cataracts, 193; on llanos, 249; on Apure, 264.
Tent, 301.
Teru-tero, Argentine, 284.
Tigre, see jaguar.
Tinaco River, north tributary, Portuguesa, 249.
Tobacco, for trade, 70.
Toldo, canoe house, 28; description, 87.
Toucan, 40, 53, 190.
Townsend, Dr. Charles H., most popular museum of, 63.
Tucacas, town, Venezuela, 247.
Tupi, Brazil, Indian family, 37.
Turtle, tortuga, 25; annual gathering, 202.

U

Uaupes River, west tributary, upper Negro, 19.
Uba, description, 87; see canoe.
Urbana, town, Venezuela, 211.

V

Valencia, town, Venezuela, 247.
Velasco, General B. Tinedo, old school sportsman, 221; endurance of, 245.
Venezuela, natural wealth, 220.
Ventuario River, east tributary, upper Orinoco, 116, 183–184.
Vocabulary for travelling, 124.
Vulture, turkey bussard, 286.

W

Wallace, Alfred Russel, on elevation, 66, 85, 98; on jaguar, 224.
Wasps, 35.
Water, drinking, washing, 242; filtering, 299; boiling, 300.
Water-hole, character, 232; sitting over, 233; variety wild life, 234–235.
Weapons, native, 145; of Gran Chaco Indians, 273.
White, Stewart Edward, 291; rifle of, 307; first choice camp luxury, 310.
Wolf, curiosity, 225.
Woodpecker, 231.
Wood-tick, 287; see also tick, red-bug, jigger, garrapata.
Wood turkey, Argentine, pavo del monte, 289.

Y

Yerbà matè, Paraguayan tea, 278; cup of and ceremony, 279.

Z

Zambo, Venezuela, 141.
Zancudo, Venezuela, 193; see insects.

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google

Sandals 227
Hammocks "

This book should be returned to the Library on or before the last date stamped below.
Please return promptly.

OCT 23 1936

FEB 10 2005

S.A. W 61
The flowing road, adventuring on th
Tozzer Library
ACV1477
2044 042 931 709

Digitized by Google

Digitized by Google